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INSIDE NYC'S SWOON ART SCENE

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HOW SEX DOLLS MIMIC CELEBRITIES

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360
AESTHETICS
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MEET THE LEBANESE POP ARTIST PROVING THAT

Pole-Dancing and *Protest* Go Hand in Hand

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **HADI AFFIF**

From the heart of a diverse, youth-led revolution, Blu Fiefer sings truth to power

BY **KEVIN KNODELL**
KIMBERLY WESTENHISER

It's a chilly December evening, and Blu Fiefer is sitting in a dim, sparsely populated cocktail bar in Beirut's trendy Mar Mikhael neighborhood. Recent economic upheavals have reduced an otherwise thriving nightlife scene to relative quiet—a situation that started well before the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We've all been victims of Lebanon's violent history and the bitter taste it has left in everyone's mouth," says the Lebanese pop artist, reflecting on the wave of popular protest that began last year and the vicious civil war that preceded it. "When the revolution started, the main comment you would hear was 'We don't want another civil war.'"

Fiefer is wearing a turtleneck sweater under an army camouflage jacket. Her fingers are tattooed, adorned with rings and crowned with long, darkly painted nails. She speaks with a latent intensity, but she's approachable and radiates generosity.

The country she calls home is situated between Israel and Syria, and conflicts from both often spill across its borders. Refugees account for almost a quarter of its population. The civil war stretched from 1975 to 1990, pitting religious communities against one another as a mix of militia groups aligned with different factions split the country. Upward of 120,000 people were killed; thousands remain displaced. To this day it occasionally endures flare-ups in political violence.

But Lebanon, and particularly its capital of Beirut, is also known for its raucous nightlife, progressive attitudes and vibrant arts community. Its bars, clubs and performance venues are legendary across the region.

Last fall, the country's wild party culture and rough-and-tumble politics collided. An ailing economy, endemic corruption, cuts in services and rising taxes prompted millions of Lebanese people to take to the streets. It quickly became a broad youth-led movement as protesters chanted demands for sweeping societal, cultural and political change.

The atmosphere of the protests was a far cry from those happening in other parts of the world: Demonstrators shared public displays of affection, sang, danced and cheered as DJs blasted their sets into the night. Musicians performed on makeshift stages. Expats joked that the protests were better than Coachella.

Fiefer was one of many Lebanese artists who participated, performing in front of a massive crowd of protesters in Beirut. Her set was live-streamed across the country.

Like Lebanon itself, Fiefer's life has been defined by constant transformation.

Born in Mexico to Lebanese and Mexican parents, Fiefer has traveled widely but calls Beirut home. She's reluctant to categorize her music under a single genre, settling on "alternative hip-hop"; to outside ears it's heavily infused with soul, pop and even classical influences. Most of her songs are in English; as she followed her expat father around the globe, it was the language she tended to speak growing up.

Not content with just singing and writing music, Fiefer is an accomplished producer and director—with a passion for pole dancing, which she has incorporated into her act for the past three years, having first explored it while studying music in England. It has become one of her favorite performance elements.

"It's a lot of adrenaline. It's very exciting to do, especially here in Lebanon, and it's interesting to have that conversation with the audience," she says.

Initially she didn't know how the pole-dancing part of her shows would be received, but Lebanese audiences have embraced it. "My specific audience is quite geared toward an open-minded community. I know there's a strong possibility I'll do it in front of the wrong crowd and it will go sour, and I'm prepared for that day."

Pole dancing has become more mainstream as women and enthusiasts of other genders embrace it for fitness. Fiefer is part of a wider community of Lebanese people who have taken it up both for exercise and for artistic expression. But here and elsewhere some get defensive when their hobby is associated with sex work.

"I don't mind exposing myself in that way or wearing high heels on stage while I'm pole dancing, or calling myself a stripper—because I don't think it's a bad thing," says Fiefer. "I think you need to have respect for where it came from and how it got popular, and on the backs of whom. It's okay if you don't want to be a stripper, but show respect."

Those conversations are particularly thorny in Lebanon. In the cultural and artistic landscape of the Arab world, contradictions are common: The Middle East is in many ways deeply conservative, but it also has a history of presenting female artists as

objects of desire, which Fiefer believes has made some independent Arab artists hesitant to put those themes front and center as they try to differentiate themselves.

"I don't think there's anything wrong with sexualizing Arab pop; I think the problem is that's all we've had," Fiefer says. "A lot of people would say I've capitalized on my sexuality and my image in my shows. The thing with me is it's just who I am. The whole idea is there's nothing wrong with being sexual. If I want to be sexual on stage I can, and if one day I decide I don't feel like it, I can. It's just the right of having that choice."

For Arab women, pushing sexual boundaries can invite intense scrutiny. The Lebanese government launched an investigation of Olympic skier Jackie Chamoun after outtakes from a calendar photo shoot leaked online showing her topless and wearing a G-string. The brief porn career that made Lebanese-born Mia Khalifa a global sensation also caused a stir in the country as newspapers condemned her for supposedly dishonoring her heritage.

Fiefer herself has occasionally been a target of criticism—and she's never been shy about facing it head-on. At the age of 17, when she performed under the stage name Poly, she appeared on a Lebanese talk show wearing a necklace of condoms as she defiantly advocated for safe sex and LGBTQIA+ rights in the face of a scolding male host. But during the fall and winter of 2019 women in the revolution began chanting against sexual assault and talking about consent.

"I didn't think it would come so soon, actually," says Fiefer. "I think it's a conversation we all have when we're out, when we're having a drink, when we're at home together, but it's not a conversation we have so publicly, on TV or in the streets. So if the revolution stops today, this is a huge milestone."

Women have played a very visible role in the protests across Lebanon. In the beginning, some handed flowers and gave hugs to soldiers and riot police—though others were photographed fighting back when authorities and paramilitaries tried to attack them. As the situation in the streets has become more hostile, women have responded accordingly.

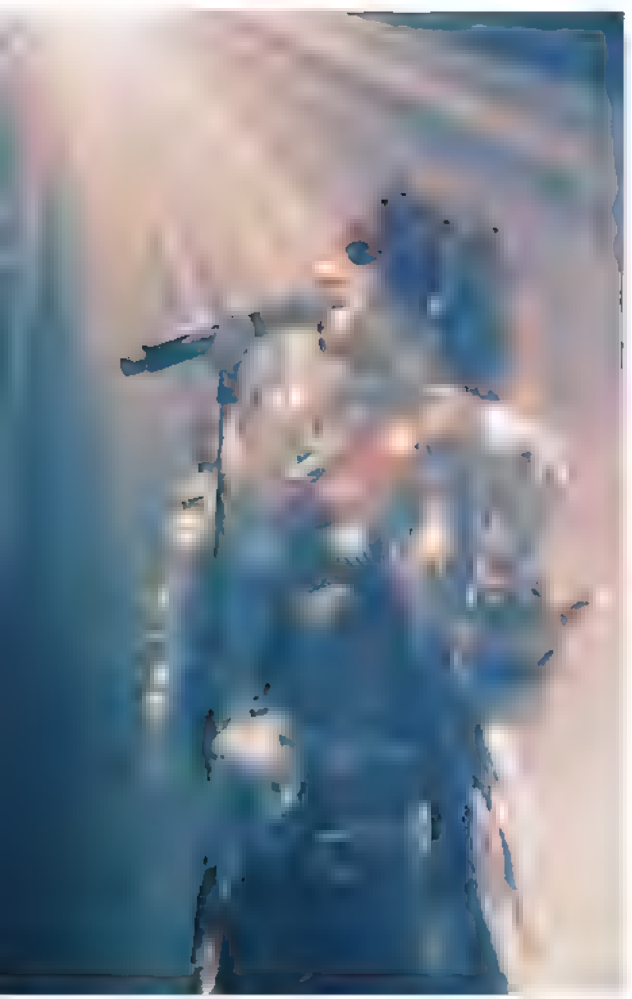
Some Western media outlets treated the participation of women in the protests as an anomaly. But to Fiefer it was obvious women would be central to an Arab revolution.

"A lot of people don't really know much about the Middle East, let alone its women," she says. "I think historically women have been in positions of power but always behind someone, always behind the man. I think with the new generation you're seeing women in roles you haven't specifically seen them in before. It's sparking inspiration in people to be less apologetic and submit less to a certain stereotype."

"It's a beautiful idea; Lebanon is a beautiful idea."

Politicians and businessmen have looted Lebanon's banks to fill offshore accounts, today many Lebanese can't access more than a small amount of their own money. Many of the country's once beautiful beaches are now landfills, and the ones that aren't have been privatized by the ultra wealthy. Last year wildfires destroyed world-famous cedar forests while the government made a lackluster firefighting effort. Meanwhile businesses across the country are closing, taxes are rising and nobody knows where their money is going.

When the protests began, artists sought to inspire revolutionary fervor through songs, paintings, graffiti and other media. For Fiefer, this proved to be a creative challenge. "It was actually quite difficult in the first month," she says, "I couldn't even listen to music. Everything felt so superficial. I couldn't relate to anything I would usually listen to because now I'm talking about basic necessities, about country, about life, about the future."



Fiefer's performance before the crowd in Beirut struck a chord. She got requests to do a cross-country "Revolution Tour." The tour never happened, but it wasn't long before DJs in other cities started remixing the audio of her performance for protesters in their communities.

Fans tell her she could enjoy greater success beyond Lebanon's borders. She has considered it. Her Mexican passport allows her to travel with greater ease than a Lebanese passport holder. "It's extremely difficult to make it here. It's extremely difficult to live here, yet everyone who leaves is nostalgic to come back," she says. "All the Lebanese who leave become even more Lebanese abroad than they are here."

She pauses before adding, "It's a beautiful idea; Lebanon is a beautiful idea."

Lately Fiefer has been writing more songs in Arabic; she performed one at the protests. She admits she never thought Arabic would become an important part of her music. It was something she associated with the oppression and war her family had tried to leave behind.

"As I get older I'm redefining what it means to me, and the people around me are redefining what it means to me," she says. "It doesn't mean what I used to fear it meant. I can make it what I want."

Fiefer also wants to use more Spanish in her work, to pay tribute to the Mexican side of her family. "I've always felt very lost. When I'm in Mexico I'm a foreigner; when I'm in Lebanon I'm a foreigner," she says. "There are millions of people around the world who feel the same because they had to leave where they're from, and I think I have a connection with those people."

In many ways she's still working out how to reconcile activism, citizenship and class consciousness with her own creative journey. "Being extravagant as I usually am feels insensitive, because I've been on the streets and I've seen how much people have," she says. "I'm not from a wealthy family, but I know the impression I might give out. I'm finding it very difficult to exist right now.

"It took me a good 40 days to put my rings back on," she adds, flashing her fingers. "And they're not even real diamonds—but it just didn't feel right in the beginning. Hopefully I'll get to a point soon where I can feel comfortable as both a citizen and an artist."

When the pandemic struck the Middle East, Fiefer had to make the difficult decision to cancel upcoming shows and start urging fans to stay home.

Prior to COVID-19's arrival in the region, divisions had started to show among the protesters. Activists accused the various political factions of trying to divide them and incite conflict. The economic collapse and rampant unemployment led to a rash of suicides last year. Many Lebanese political leaders seemed to hope they could wait out the protests—that a combination of time and inclement weather would eventually cause the protesters to tire and give up. But the country's economy continued to tank, and Lebanese people stayed angry.

Sporadic clashes between Lebanese citizens and authorities

have already resumed as people on both sides struggle to pay for food and basic goods. Some activists have called for comrades in possession of masks and gloves to return to the streets, practicing social distancing while standing firm on their social and political demands.

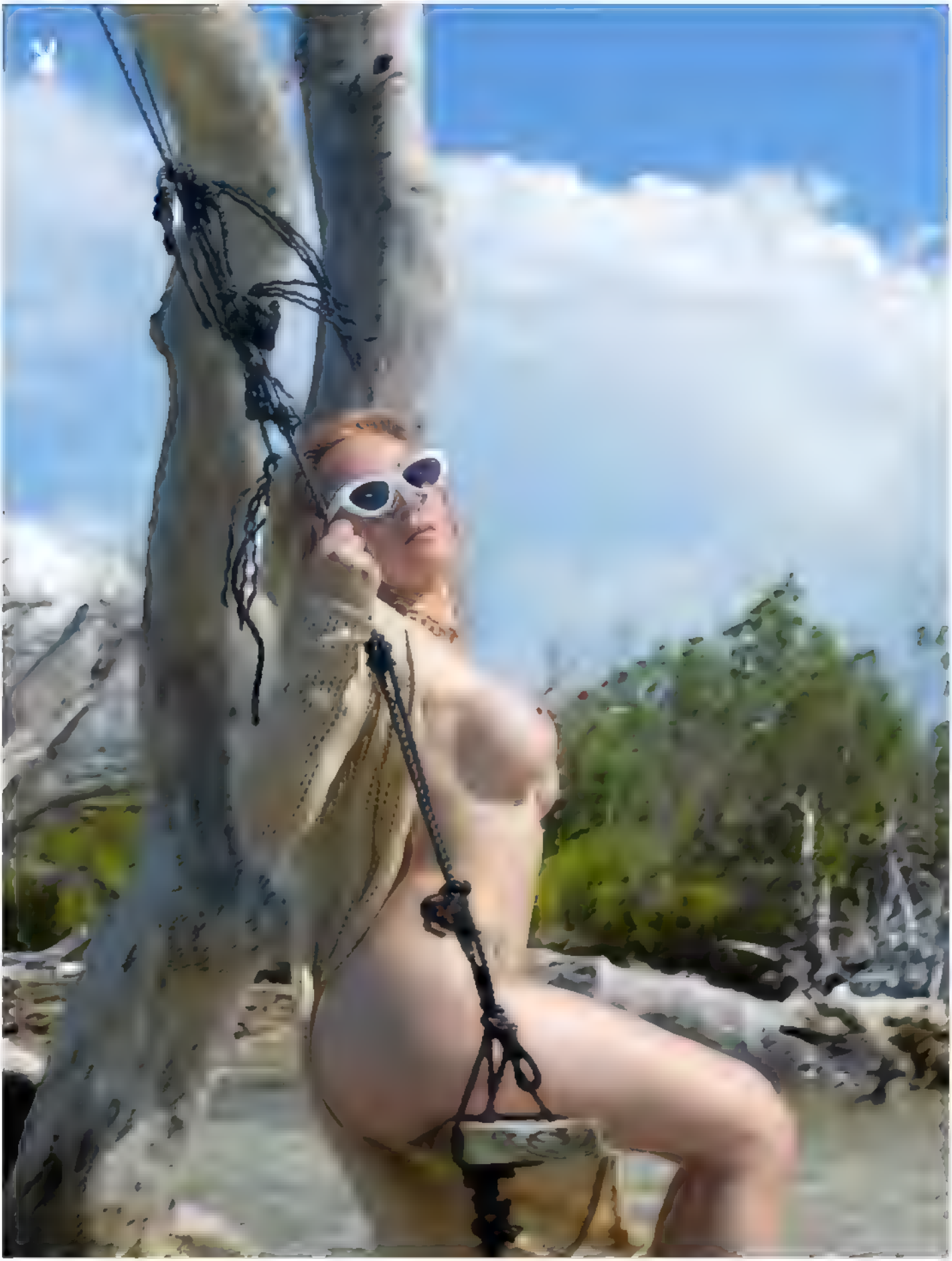
"If things stop being peaceful, it's not our fault at all," says Fiefer. "If things go sour, you're asking for it, because you're giving people no choice."

When people do leave their homes again, they likely won't accept a return to business as usual.

"The fact that people made us feel like our demands might be attainable has been very dangerous to the power," Fiefer says. "There's no going back." ■

Model **@vasquezheaven_ | @heavendvasquez**

Photography by **Hafice Slader | @RafeesePhotography**
PR **Raw Media Group | @Raw.Media.Group**



Tell us something surprising about you? I should have been a scientist or astrophysicist. Honestly, I'm such a science nerd and I mean every type of science... I'm literally obsessed. I will read or study everything from quantum physics books to study how the brain works just for fun sometimes.

Were you excited to shoot for Playboy? Excited would be the biggest understatement. This has been my biggest dream and goal for as long as I've been modeling and now that it's finally happening, I feel beyond blessed and it feels surreal.

What inspires you? My family. It sounds cliche but they really are my biggest inspiration to be the best version of myself and pursue everything I have ever wanted. I'm their role model so I want to make them proud too.

Why did you choose to pursue a career in modeling? Growing up I wasn't the most confident and I'm not going to lie I had to grow into my looks. I didn't start being comfortable in my body until I was about 18. I never believed I could model but I always loved challenges so I challenged myself to model and the more I did the more confident I became. I've learned so much about myself and a lot of that started with modeling.

Who do you look up to in the modeling industry? I have two. The first would be Pamela Anderson because I think she will always be iconic and I think she was so dedicated to letting the world know that she was more than just a hot blonde with big boobs. She wanted to be known for more and that's inspiring to me. My second would be Adriana Lima because I'm also Brazilian so she has always been an inspiration to me and the fact she does so much and still looks beautiful is inspiring to me.

What are some of your hobbies? Really anything outdoors... hiking, rock climbing, jet skiing, snowboarding, ATVing, etc. I also love traveling and experiencing new places, people, food and cultures.

Name three things on your bucket list? Playboy was on my bucket list so I'm beyond excited to be able to check that on my bucket list. If I had to pick three more, I would say:
1) skydiving, because I feel like there's no other feeling like it with the adrenaline and feeling free
2) To visit Brazil during carnival and dance samba
3) To finish my script and film my movie.

Turn-ons: A man who knows what he wants and pursues it because it shows dedication, discipline and motivation. Confidence! A confident man shows me I don't have to worry about him being insecure. The last big one would be an intellectual conversation. If you can connect with me on an intellectual level you make me melt.

Turn-offs: Inconsistency for sure. There's nothing more unattractive than a man who says he wants something and then doesn't continue to follow through with it. Lying is a big one for me as well because I consider myself to be a very understanding person so if a man feels the need to lie to me that shows me he doesn't value or respect me. Cockiness... now I love a confident man but to be cocky is a big turn-off.

Describe to us your perfect date: I would say visiting some place exotic like Hawaii and going hiking to the waterfalls there and then go have a nice dinner on the beach and star gaze with intellectual conversation.

Which world capital would you most like to visit, and why? Definitely Rome. My mother's side has Italian in them, so Italy has always been a lifelong goal to visit for its rich culture.

What is your mantra? I'm not out here to prove anybody wrong. I'm just here to prove myself right.

GEENA ROCERO'S SPECIAL RECIPE

WRITTEN BY
GEENA ROCERO

PHOTOGRAPHY BY
EVAN WOODS

Our August 2019 Playmate reflects on the cultural and personal redolence of the Philippines' national dish — and its surprising shelter-in-place usefulness

Chicken adobo is pretty much the most famous Filipino dish. We have 7,000 islands in the Philippines, and different islands have different ways of making it.

When I was growing up, my dad did most of the cooking (and the dishes and the laundry; he was the best stay-at-home dad). My mom was the breadwinner—a teacher for 22 years who always had a side hustle, like doing sales for various products. For a conservative culture like the one I grew up in, the roles were definitely reversed.

I moved to the United States at 17 and lived with my mom in San Francisco. My dad passed away before we left the Philippines, so my mom learned how to cook basically everything he'd cooked. Four years later, I moved to New York City by myself. The first month, a cold March in 2005, I was so homesick; I just wanted something homey and comfy. I remember phoning my mom to say, "I'm craving your cooking!" So she basically told me how to cook chicken adobo over the phone, and once I'd learned it I was like, That's how simple it is?

I'd never cooked anything in my life except boiling water for noodles or frying an egg. After that lesson from my mom, I started experimenting with omelets because you can mix and match so many different things. From the very beginning the concept was, What can I do that doesn't necessarily have to follow a strict recipe? As I moved forward, I realized it's just about understanding the base. Filipino cooking usually starts with sautéing garlic and onion, garlic and ginger or a combination of the three. Then you build it up with fish sauce, soy sauce, vinegar or even tomato sauce. As soon as I'd learned those basic ideas, I was like, You know what? I can do this!

I started sharing my chicken adobo with neighbors and friends. One or two drumsticks with white rice is so easy to cook, and I loved doing it. Cooking at home feels appropriate for this time, because you can make a lot so you'll have leftovers. And you have options, which is especially important now that most of us are sheltering in place. If you don't have one of the ingredients and can't go to the store, you just swap in something else.

Perhaps most famous Filipino restaurant in New York is a place called Jeepney. Filipinos living in the United States are, by many counts, the second largest population of Asian Americans (after the Chinese), but our food cultures just recently entered the mainstream conversation. In the last couple of years, Jeepney led the way in cooking unapologetic Filipino food and providing a cultural hub for young Filipino Americans.

I had my August 2019 Playmate party there. They created a life-sized print of my Centerfold and hung it at the front of the restaurant. It's home to me, obviously.

When the COVID-19 tragedy started happening last month, I reached out to the owner, who's a dear friend of mine, and asked what I could do to help. We created a fund-raising video to help her take care of her employees and sell merch. And I just saw that they're open for delivery now!

Chicken Adobo by Geena Rocero

INGREDIENTS

2	tablespoons coconut oil
6	cloves smashed garlic
½	medium red or white onion
10	pieces chicken (my favorite is dark meat — either drumsticks or thighs)
¾ cup	soy sauce
½ cup	vinegar (white, apple cider or coconut vinegar works)
½ cup	chicken broth or water
6 bay	leaves
Ground black pepper to taste (the more peppery the better)	
2	tablespoons lemon juice (I prefer fresh lemon)

STEPS

1. Heat coconut oil in a wok or large pan.
2. Sauté garlic and onion till brown.
3. Add chicken and brown on both sides.
4. Add soy sauce, vinegar, broth/water, bay leaves and pepper.
5. Simmer over medium heat for about 10 minutes.
6. Stir, then reduce heat to low and simmer another 15 minutes or until chicken is cooked.
7. Drizzle the lemon juice.
8. Serve with steamed white rice (sometimes I use coconut garlic rice). This dish lasts in the fridge; I'd say it actually gets better over time as the marinade seeps in. (I sometimes eat it for days!) I also shred the chicken and add it to soup, salad or a wrap.

CHASITY SAMONE RETHINKS THE MAKEOVER

WRITTEN BY
CHASITY SAMONE

PHOTOGRAPHY BY
ADRIENNE RAQUEL

Our February 2020 Playmate shows that DIY beauty and wellness (and a glass or two of wine) can help us all stay grounded

When I decided to start modeling, I moved to New York in search of a place where I belonged. I didn't know what type of model I should be, since modeling has specific lanes you can land in—fashion, commercial, swimsuit, beauty. I kept working shoots, and the beauty community eventually found me. I didn't know I could be a beauty model until they told me

The beauty industry accepted me from the beginning, and I've met so many amazing people through it. Coloured Raine—founded by Loraine Dowdy, a black woman—was one of the first beauty companies to gave me opportunities. There was also AJ Crimson, and I worked with Jeffree Star for many years. They helped make me who I am today.

I deeply admire the beauty industry for the strides it has made in promoting all types of beauty. We have to work hard to make a name for ourselves—if you don't run with what's new and do what needs to be done, you'll just get left behind—but the groundbreaking people I work with have global followings. I feel we've made good progress even though we still have a long way to go. There are also different levels to representation. Diverse models are an important step, but we should also be represented behind the scenes—as founders and makeup artists and more

Being quarantined, you'd think beauty would be less important since people aren't out and about—but that assumes you get dolled up only for others. I was just telling my sister, who had broken a nail and was upset about it, that beauty and all the self-care it can bring should be seen as a mental health issue. When I look good, I feel good. If I'm not looking on-point, then I'll probably be feeling a little off that day. How you perceive your beauty affects your energy.

Now that we're without our usual beauty services—we can't go to the nail salon, we can't go to the beauty shop—it's extra important to be resourceful. Allow yourself to experiment, look on YouTube and see what you can do for yourself. And there's always something on Amazon you can buy to perk yourself up. I want to bring some cheer to my day-to-day, so I've been messing with colors and glitter. For my Instagram Live tutorial with Playboy I'll likely be using my favorite palettes to try out a spring look.

You don't always have control over what's happening around you, but you can control yourself and focus on your own sanity. That's what my passion for beauty does for me.

Chasity's Self-care Tips

See how to be your best self in quarantine

1. SKIN CARE
Do some research and find a combo that helps you end the day feeling fresh. Every evening I apply cleanser, rosewater toner, moisturizer and avocado eye cream.

2. YOGA, PRAYER OR MEDITATION
I love this because it requires close to no equipment and can be done anywhere

3. CONNECTING WITH LOVED ONES
Staying in touch can keep you grounded. I have 10 brothers and sisters, so our FaceTime is pretty lit.

4. PLANNING
Give yourself something to look forward to when social distancing comes to an end. The first thing I'm going to do is plan a trip to Tulum.

5. INDULGING
A glass of wine cannot be underestimated.

Creating Wonder With New York City's
Swoon

After 20 years on the scene, the artist's mythological creations evolve

BY **ROMY OLTUSKI**

The artist known as Swoon sits at a sketch table in her Red Hook, Brooklyn studio, fiddling with a disembodied papier-mâché head

"There's nothing private," she says, running a hand through her wild curls as I roam one of two rooms she rents in a labyrinthine artists-and-makers' complex. Behind her hangs a large-scale mural depicting gritty but feminine myth-like scenes of motherhood. Smaller, ethereal cut-out portraits of women, many of them family and friends, are arranged in small clusters on the surrounding walls

Because she hosted a party here recently, her studio is tidier than usual, she says, seemingly by way of apology

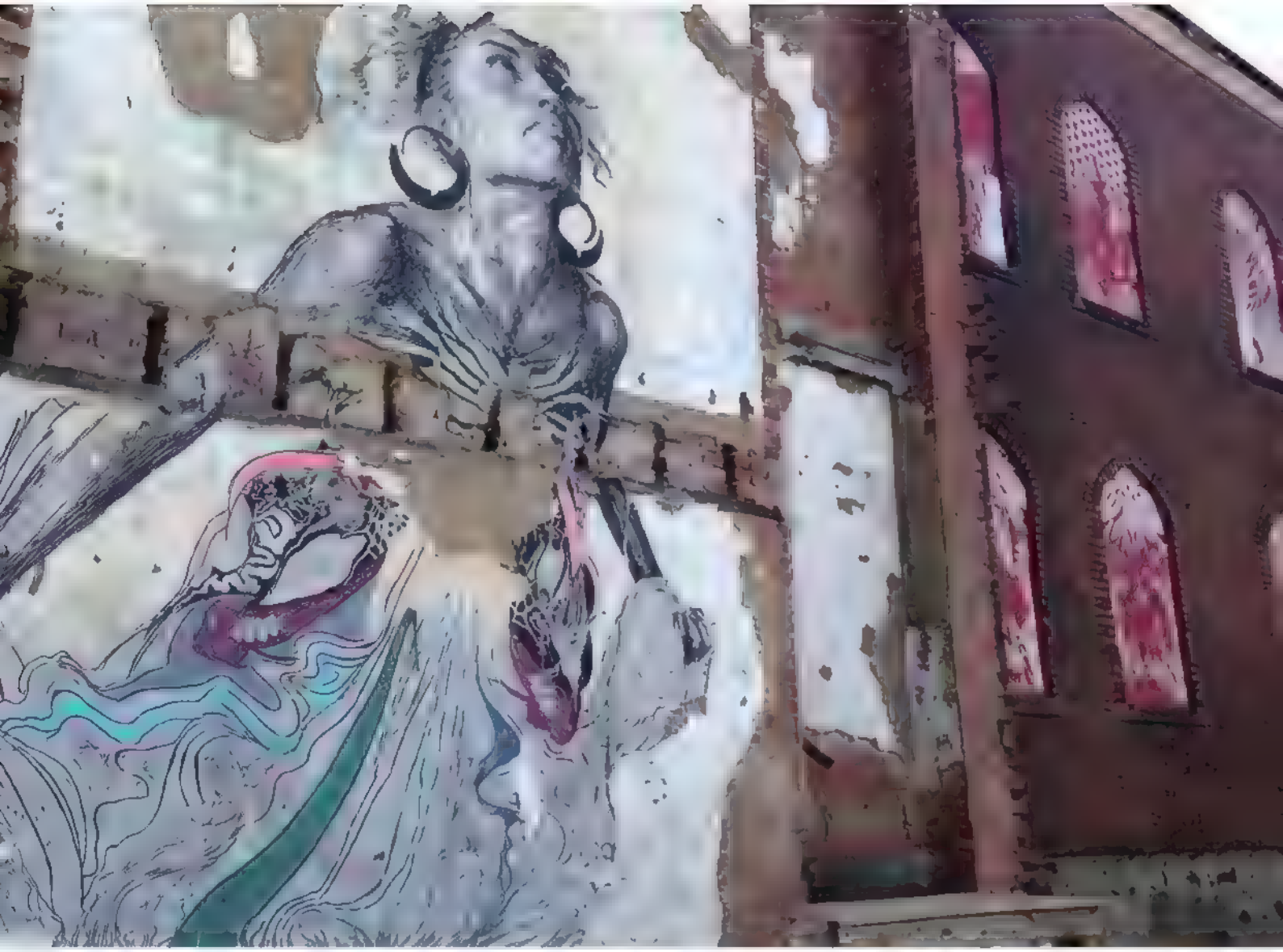
The spaces Swoon creates are more often overflowing. Her recent show Cicada, at the Jeffrey Deitch gallery in New York, features a tangle of wire and cloth spilling out of the wall into a lush, overgrown swamp-like scene. Paper flowers and insects swarm a mer-like character, who cracks her ribs open to reveal snakes uncoiling from her heart. The fabric jumble appears to be gobbling up another figure, its limbs disappearing like moss-choked flotsam.

Cicada, 2019, installation view at Jeffrey Deitch gallery.
***Photographed by** Genevieve Hanson*

The recent body of work she's been developing, beginning with Cicada, marks a new direction for Swoon. Injecting her characters with movement, she has adopted into her practice an entirely new medium she's spent the past two years teaching herself: stop-motion film. Meanwhile, her visual language has taken on a more explicitly sinister and introspective tone, a departure for an artist who made her name beautifying the outside world.

Swoon, born Caledonia Curry in New London, Connecticut (she spent most of her childhood in Daytona Beach, Florida), began pasting her dreamy ink-block portraits on city walls in the late 1990s. Alongside peers like Shepard Fairey, Banksy and her good friend JR, she became central to a youth movement fueling street art's ascent. Swoon was one of the few women to gain recognition in that world. Her bold, feminine murals, with nods to Greek mythology, soon captivated major museums and galleries, which she filled with immersive multimedia installations.

Her 2014 exhibit Submerged Motherlands shaded viewers under a paper tree that reached the height of the Brooklyn Museum's 72-foot-tall rotunda. It was the museum's first solo show dedicated to a living street artist.



Thalassa '013 street paste-up

From early on, Swoon saw art as a medium for activism, creating "spaces of wonder" that bring people together. In New Orleans, together with the New Orleans Airlift collective, she created a musical village whose ramshackle treehouses double as functioning instruments. With her community of punk artists and DIY craftspeople she famously built three rafts out of garbage and sailed them across the Adriatic Sea and into the Venice Biennale, uninvited. The renegade crew invited onlookers to join them onboard.

"Swoon's practice is based in generosity," says Anne Pasternak, the director of the Brooklyn Museum and a longtime champion of Swoon. "She wants to create dignified, humanistic, beautiful things about people, for people. She uplifts those who are less visible in our society, and she transforms the most banal and even devastated sites into places for real beauty."

After the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, Swoon launched a decade-long project building colorful, disaster-resistant homes in the remote village of Cormiers. Having just finished the rafts, Swoon says, "I was working with a lot of artists and builders that knew how to confront exceptionally difficult situations and problem solve in unusual ways. I had an instinct that we could make that skillset useful."

In Philadelphia's Kensington neighborhood, which has one of the highest rates of opiate overdoses in the country, she leads an art therapy workshop for people in the throes of addiction. It's a project she plans to grow in tandem with her outspoken efforts to combat the stigma surrounding addiction.

If there's a thread that runs through Swoon's diverse body of work, it's "that idea that creativity can be a really powerful part of how you rebuild after disasters of any kind," she says. "Social, physical, all different kinds."

Photographed

Photographed by

Swoon's early life was colored by the chaos of her parents' heroin addiction and struggles with mental illness. Forgiving them took years of therapy and meant reconciling memories of fear and trauma with memories of joy. "I literally thought my mom was going to kill me sometimes," she says, describing a weeklong psychosis her mother experienced when Swoon was six. "And my mom would bake big zucchini bread and take me to art classes and be this wonderful person, and those two things are just true."

That dual nature became a central refrain in Swoon's work, the figure of "dark mother goddess" looming large in many of her installations. Partially autobiographical, her art was both an escape and a form of therapy.

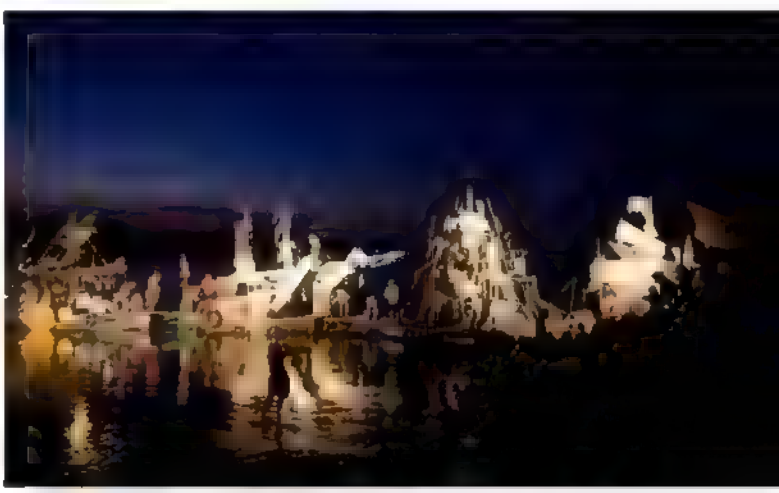
"Almost whatever I'm doing, it's going to be through art," she says. "Am I thinking through a problem? It's going to happen through art. Am I healing all these old wounds? It's going to happen through art. Am I getting friends together? Art."

In Cicada and in her growing body of stop-motion films, Swoon uses art to go inward, unearthing the trauma lodged in parts of her mind she hadn't dared explore.

Behind the swamp-like installation that welcomes visitors to Cicada and an adjoining room filled with portraits of her friends is the show's centerpiece: a small movie theater where a five-minute, semi-narrative reel brings Swoon's characters to life.

Their awkward, fitful transformations are as discomfiting as they are mesmerizing. In one vignette, a Raggedy Ann doll is smothered by the "tarantula mother," a paper spider with an anthropomorphic head and snake-like tongues. Cicadas flit their wings in haunted home scenes, colorful flower beds and underwater dream worlds—which were actually filmed underwater; Swoon spent last May at an artists' residency established in Robert Rauschenberg's former estate, sinking her drawings into the late pop legend's swimming pool to capture the serene "amniotic world" of rebirth. ("Some of them survived," she says enthusiastically.)

Her decision to introduce what she calls "time-based storytelling" into her work was driven by a head-on collision with temporality. In 2013 Swoon lost her mother to lung cancer and, a year and a half later, her father to suicide. It forced the artist to reckon with the past. "It almost felt as though I got sucked out backward through my childhood," she says. "All this stuff got re-enlivened, and I had to deal with it."



Photographed by

After that inflection point, the personal nature and raw emotional depth of her work reached a new pitch. "I've been really outward all my life, working out on the street, working in community," she says. "And I just felt this call of like, Girl, you need to get inside and you need to work through some things and you need to to be introspective."

When she did, she says, "I was like, Hey, there's this old dream I had 20 years ago of making films, and street work and community-based work just kind of took center stage. But actually, this is still here."

Swoon sees the stuttering nature of stop-motion as an apt parallel to the disassociation she experienced as a child. "When you're tiny and things are shithouse crazy, one of the coping mechanisms that's available is to just be like, Bonk, I am not even here, I am somewhere else."

Art allowed her to create those other worlds, but it also left her feeling "there were gaps in the frame" when it came to her sense of reality. She grew up fearing that her family's history of mental illness would eventually catch up to her. "I was always like, I'm just going to get mine."

Cicada is Swoon's unfiltered confrontation of past trauma, but it's also a reverie on the transformation that introspection can bring. "I called it Cicada because of the way the cicadas go underground and do this incredible hibernation process and then emerge, like out of these other forms of themselves," she says.

While the show began a new phase in the artist's career, it also celebrated a homecoming. The Jeffrey Deitch gallery is the site of Swoon's first major show, which in 2005 garnered international attention almost overnight; she was 27. As a curator, Deitch carved out a niche spotting promising artists and facilitating their wildest, most unsellable ideas, and his gallery at 76 Grand Street became the epicenter of a new wave of experimental multimedia art, including

Swoon's cobbled-together cityscape installation there, whose opening drew some 800 people, by her memory. The afterparty was an impromptu block party where a noise-punk band performed atop an illegally parked truck and gallery-goers crowd-surfed the artist down a shoulder-to-shoulder-packed Grand Street.

"I was like, Anything else is going to feel less than," says Swoon, who was nervous to return to the reopened space 14 years later.

The night before Cicada opened in November, she posted about her insecurity on Instagram. "I'm 41 years old now…and no longer a central, active part of a spontaneous youth movement (which was then exploding all over the world). I'm just me now. Callie. Learning a new thing, and showing it to the world," she wrote. "I couldn't help but compare myself to myself."

Swoon no longer considers herself a street artist. It's been years since she's wheat-pasted on city walls with any regularity. Going underground, as she describes it, is part of what has allowed her to explore the innermost crevices of her subconscious.

It has also freed her to create her most boldly sexual work yet.

"My work has had this reputation for being PG," she says of her earlier pieces. For street artists, there's a certain civic duty to self-censor because audiences of graffiti art often haven't chosen to be; they encounter it on their way to work, to school.

But seeing her community of artists and activists reconvene to uplift her was joyful in another way. "We found ways to make it beautiful and fun but to also acknowledge, 'Yeah, we've grown up,'" she says, adding with a laugh, "I don't want to surf Grand Street again."

"My whole life, working out on the street, I had this feeling that you're sort of part of this community in a way that you need to be responsible for," she says. "Who is seeing this? What's it like for them?" But in galleries and on film, viewers choose to enter Swoon's world. "Now I get to be like, What is beautiful to me? What is sexy to me?"

In one life-size drawing in Cicada, a naked woman sits cross-legged, wearing a strap-on dildo. "I just wanted to make a sexy portrait," Swoon says of the image, a stark departure from her tunic-draped goddesses. "This is without a doubt the first time that I've done that." She thought twice about hanging it up in her studio, where her students would see it. "When I brought back this giant painting of my incredibly hot, sexy friend looking you straight in the eye with her dick out, I was just like, Is this fine?" she says with a laugh.

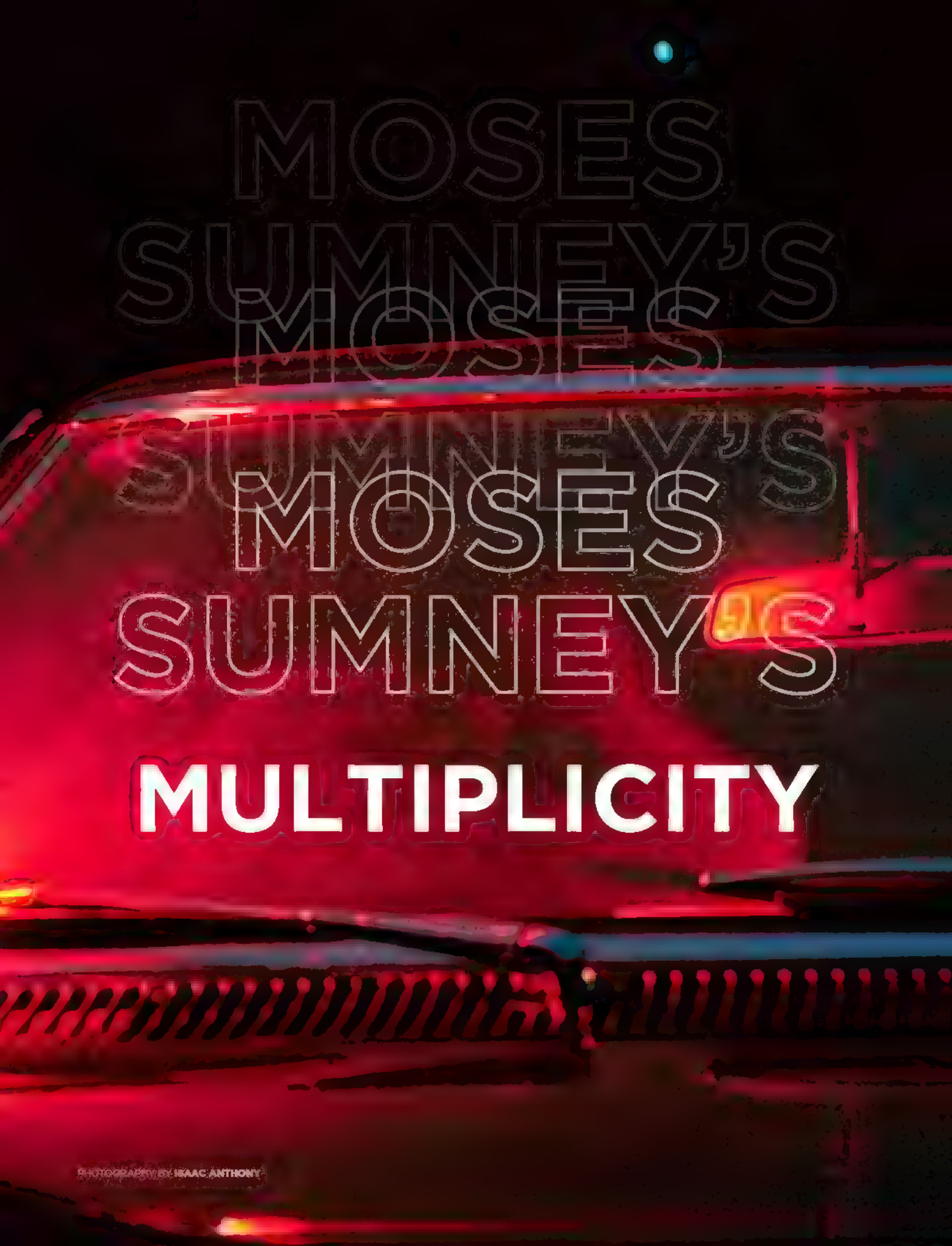
Swoon gestures to another portrait hanging in her studio, a nude drawing of the artist Monica Canilao. "She's been a friend and lover and collaborator for so many years. I always photograph her naked because she's fucking hot, but it's always been part of my private world. This was a moment where I thought, Okay, I'm ready to express some things that I really think are beautiful and sensual and sexy.… I'm a fucking grown-ass woman now. It's time. It's time for me to just own more of myself."

Since Cicada closed in February, Swoon has turned her attention to creating a feature-length animated children's film. It will be based on a fairytale she wrote about her mother's psychotic break. In the Grimm tradition, it may not actually be appropriate for children, she warns.

"I was like, What are you doing, Callie? This is so weird! But you know, sometimes as an artist you just get your marching orders, and you do them."

Fume Update "Dirty" installation view at Invictart, Paris

Photographed by


MOSES SUMNEY'S
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MOSES SUMNEY'S
MULTIPLICITY
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ISAAC ANTHONY

With his sprawling new album, 'Grae,' the chameleonic artist demonstrates the joy—and the urgency—of defying labels

BY **STEPHANIE SMITH-STRICKLAND**

If he were a marble-hewn bust, Moses Sumney would be a masterpiece of plurality. bitone eyebrows, a jaunty loc crown, low-cut bleached-blond sides. Yet on this late-February day in Los Angeles, the very human artist is posing, leanly muscled and shirtless, in billowing black pants and an equally inky structural hat he jokingly observes resembles a gele

His figure contrasts dramatically with the verdant backdrop of stubby lemon and orange trees spaced precisely across the small field behind him. Moments earlier, he and a stylist flirted with the idea of a plumed pirate hat paired with a sheer shirt he described as "a bit too Renaissance fair," though the accompanying nipple blockers piqued his interest. The deliberations echo Sumney's high school years, when he was not yet brave enough to sport the goth looks he secretly coveted

The child of Ghanaian immigrants—who he later learned entered the country without papers—Sumney now resides in Asheville, North Carolina, where, according to the artist, everyone is a bit weird so he fits right in. In 2018 and for a large portion of 2019, he was locked away in isolation (well before it was a transnational requirement) finishing his second album, Grae, half of which appeared early this year. Grae follows the critically acclaimed Aromanticism, released in 2017 while Sumney was still floating on the accolades from his 2016 EP, Lamentations. His 2014 breakout, Mid-City Island, is a bewitchingly nebulous EP created on a four-track cassette recorder gifted to him by Dave Sitek of TV on the Radio.

By 2015 Sumney seemed poised for a more traditional kind of stardom, appearing on the opening track of Beck's album Song Reader and capturing the ear of fellow musicians James Blake and Solange, with whom he remains a close collaborator. He was seen as something of an indie darling by the major labels that courted him—a provocateur whose raw talent could be shaped into a more palatable idea of black indie artistry. He enjoyed the courting phase but ultimately turned down major-label offers in favor of Jagjaguwar, an indie label that has been home to Bon Iver, Unknown Mortal Orchestra, Sharon Van Etten and more. The label released Aromanticism and, on May 15, the full edition of Grae

Hat, pants and boots, vintage

Weighing in at 20 tracks and just over an hour in length, the project is a sprawling, open-ended statement on liberation and existing in liminal spaces. Its themes are starkly evoked in the song "also also also and and and," wherein Sumney intones, "I really do insist that others recognize my inherent multiplicity / What I no longer do is take pains to explain it or defend it."

"I realized over the course of the record that I could do anything," Sumney says, seated in a lofted alcove of the private home where the shoot took place, "and that the permission to do it is granted by me. So why not be audacious?" It's a rhetorical question, but it raises another: Is Sumney's audacity sustainable in an industry that tends to pay lip service to individuality while cramming it into boxes?

Much of the project's narrative language is established through spoken vignettes courtesy of friends and creators such as author and cultural critic Taiye Selasi, writer and speaker Ayesha K. Raines, actor Ezra Miller, writer Michael Chabon and actress Michaela Coel. Their voices provide structural reinforcement to Sumney's observations on the inherently fluid nature of cultural identity, gender identity and sexuality. Throughout the album, Sumney ruminates on how different modes of conforming to society can, if one has the courage, be deconstructed and then reconstructed to reflect personal truths in spaces of solitude.

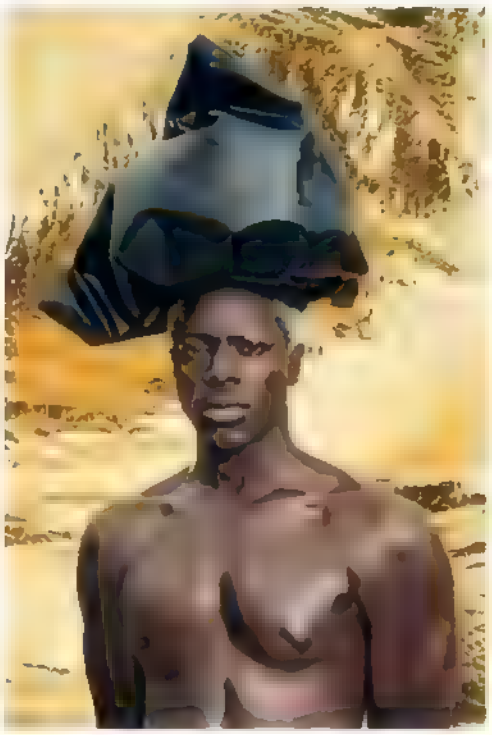
"Insula," Grae's opening number, begins with a looped, disembodied voice reciting "isolation comes from insula which means island" over a swelling string arrangement. For Sumney, who left his previous life in Los Angeles in 2017, the quietude of Asheville became exactly that—an island where he could freely reflect and, like a caterpillar in a cocoon, prepare for transformation.

"It's hard to care what other people think when you're not constantly confronted with it," he says in a rich, slightly weathered alto. "Living in L.A., you're constantly confronted with not only what other people think of you but your consciousness of what other people think of you. They might not be thinking anything at all, but you move in space in a way that you're constantly confronted with your own self. Being less and less around people, I was constantly confronted with myself—but not myself to the eyes of others, just myself to the eyes of my own desires. I always seek to be honest in the work, and I felt the most honest thing I could do was follow those desires, which are rather varied."

In the video for "Virile," one of Grae's lead singles, a shirtless Sumney dances through a meat locker, both taunting and fleeing from symbols of toxic masculinity with the abandon of a whirling dervish. It's a fitting accompaniment to a song that mulls over the constructions of masculinity, rejecting its binding tropes over a soundscape of harp, flute, strings and bass (the last one courtesy of producer, Kendrick Lamar collaborator and low-end virtuoso Thundercat). Bombastic and theatrical but at times deeply introspective, Sumney's voice acts as a liquid binding agent, melding the instrumentals into a cohesive waking dream, or nightmare, for those enmeshed in the performance of maleness.

"I'm actually getting back into it," Sumney says. "Masculinity, when it's positive, is sick as fuck. Unfortunately, the toxic version of it is what reigns on the earth. It's important to understand that there is masculinity and femininity in everyone, if you choose to identify with those two things. There are people who don't with either, and that's fine as well. I just think it's a natural part of the earth that they both exist. So now I'm just trying to think, what are the positive forms in which masculinity can exist? Sometimes masculinity is in women, and sometimes it's in men. It's the same thing with femininity, right? So now I'm like, 'Oh cool, I actually quite like being a man.' As long as it's not oppressive."

Such observations play into Sumney's larger thesis. We should all be free to exist in gray areas and to bend the rules in the same way those with structural privilege have always gotten away with doing. "In terms of who gets to bend the rules, it's foremost white men," he says. "It was fascinating to me how a lot of the tropes for how a man is supposed to act come from mainstream white society, but also the people who are forgiven the most for breaking those rules are then white men."



Hat and pants: Cameron Williams

He goes on: "Growing up—not just in an African household, because it applies to black Americans as well—and thinking about the structure of the performance of masculinity and how much I could bend it, or weave in and out of it, was a process of unlearning. I think a big part of the unlearning was being like, Well, [white men] are doing it, so why the hell can't I? Your life might be harder, but you do have the choice."

Existing authentically outside assigned spaces, potentially sacrificing ease and profit, has no doubt complicated Sumney's career, but it has also given him a gift: the ability to grow and learn without the obstruction of others' expectations. Not everyone receives the gift, as he recently reinforced in a lengthy Twitter thread highlighting the many indie black artists (a number of them queer) he felt deserved more recognition.

Sumney's position brings forward an interesting dichotomy: On the one hand, popular music often embraces expressions of fluidity. From Prince to Freddie Mercury to Patti Smith, there's a long line of mainstream artists whose experimentation with ideas of gender and sexuality are inherent in their personal and professional identities. But their existence is the exception and not the rule—doubly so for non-white artists, many of whom are pigeonholed by the expectation that they adhere to tropes associated with prevailing ideas of "black music."

The weight of such implications is more than theoretical. It's genuinely difficult for left-of-center emerging talents to find ways to meaningfully take up space—to navigate their careers authentically when carving out said space is contingent on assimilation. Whether it's Sumney or an artist like K. Michelle, who gained prominence as an R&B singer purely because she was dissuaded from marketing herself as a country artist, we constantly see this conflict at work. More troubling, perhaps, is how easy it often is for white artists to move outside this framework, effortlessly shifting between identities, genre delineations and more, completely oblivious to the fact that their peers of color are rarely extended the same grace.

"There's the simple fact that once you do something in the world, it's like the world expects you to do it forever," says fellow musician Shaun Ross, whose albinism made him an uncommon face in the modeling world. Ross is transitioning into a music career, but he's finding that his history as a model and his experimental sonic aesthetic are often difficult for mainstream audiences to reconcile. Like Sumney's music, Ross's funk- and futurism-inflected sounds underlie queer experiences while defying easy categorization. Although his music has earned him a devoted fan base, it has also created hurdles in his efforts to infiltrate more mainstream music spaces.

"People must understand that before anything we are artists," says Ross. "We should all be able to have this freedom of expression that isn't attached to the need for labels, whether that be in regards to gender, race, sexuality or anything else."

Grae does not ask permission to do what Ross describes, create in a multitude of ways, all of which are true to the artist. Sumney's approach feels infinitely more exciting than dialogues that seek to make concrete constructs of the amorphous. "We have identity, and then identity on a national scale, and those conversations can be really porous and really shallow, and are really kind of boring," he says. "Everyone is just saying the same thing over and over. Whether they're on one side or the other side, it's just two sides of things. In a way, I didn't want to talk about it, because then I'd still be talking about identity. But it was honest to this project."

Sumney also leaned on his cross-cultural and cross-continental upbringing as inspiration for Grae. The upheaval of living between drastically different worlds produced a feeling of statelessness but also an understanding of how identity as it relates to nation, gender and even sexuality feels absolute only in certain environments—and why conversations around community and

belonging can be myopic

"I was thinking about what it was like growing up on both coasts—on the coast of Africa and the coast of America," he says. "It made me think about how the foundation of my personality or identity is displacement, and where that comes from. I've been thinking more about feeling displaced, and that maybe I like different kinds of things because my life has been a mix of a lot of genres and I never fully welcomed any of them."

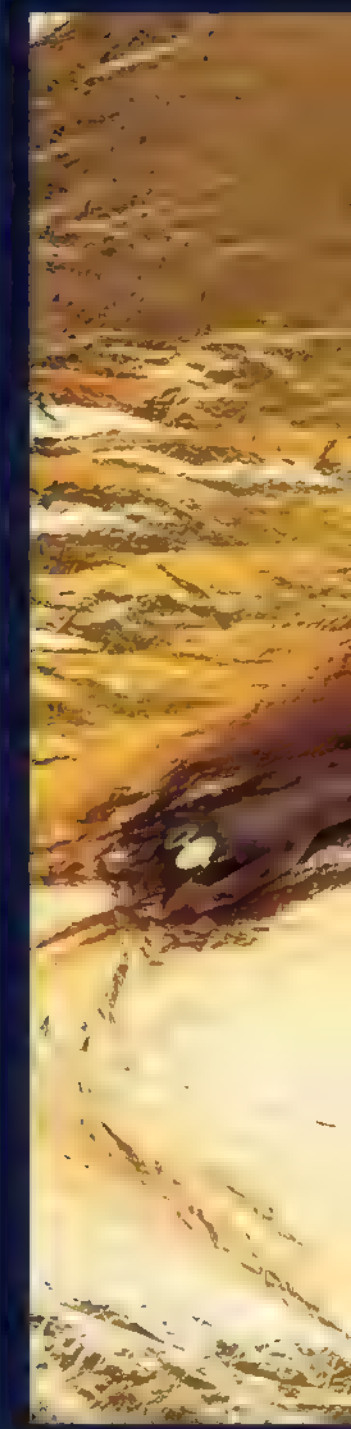
Like Sumney, Ghanaian American musician, singer-songwriter and engineer Amaarae grew up between Ghana and the U.S. Her music is also grounded in the exploration of identity. During time spent in Atlanta, she devoured Southern rap. In predominantly white suburban New Jersey, she discovered alternative and post-punk. Today the singer's falsetto croonings draw parallels to Esther Jones, the Roaring Twenties black jazz singer who was the inspiration for the character Betty Boop. Echoing Sumney's ruminations on both romantic and aromantic love in projects such as Passionfruit Summers, which features her 2017 single "Fluid," Amaarae challenges ideas of femininity, juxtaposing a babyish voice with an often androgynous presentation.

"The concept of fluidity can mean so many things," she says. "For me the idea of fluidity transcends what people typically associate it with, which is sexuality or gender. I actually think adaptation is a form of fluidity, and I guess that's something I've always experimented with. Living somewhere like Smyrna, Georgia and wearing Hot Topic to me is fluid. Kids were wearing Jordans and Iverson jerseys and I'm wearing goth clothing, and they're looking at me like, What the fuck? But pushing those boundaries and setting off those ideas in people's heads of what it means to live in your identity—all those things are important to me in my music and in my life."

While living in Los Angeles, Sumney similarly found himself questioning what it meant to take on an identity, more specifically one tied to blackness.

"I'd spent years trying to build community with people," he says. "This is actually way too honest, but I don't care. I actually found that for me, building with people, especially black people, I sometimes had to do it in ways that felt unnatural. Unnatural only because in order to be accepted, I had to shave down things about myself, shave down things about my personality, get rid of certain types of friends so I would be liked. I felt that was a necessary sacrifice, because it was important to me, and still is, to have community with black people and uplift black people. Then I was in isolation, and I was like, Oh, now I'm in community with the trees and birds and squirrels!".

Top: Marvin Desroc. Pnats: Vintage



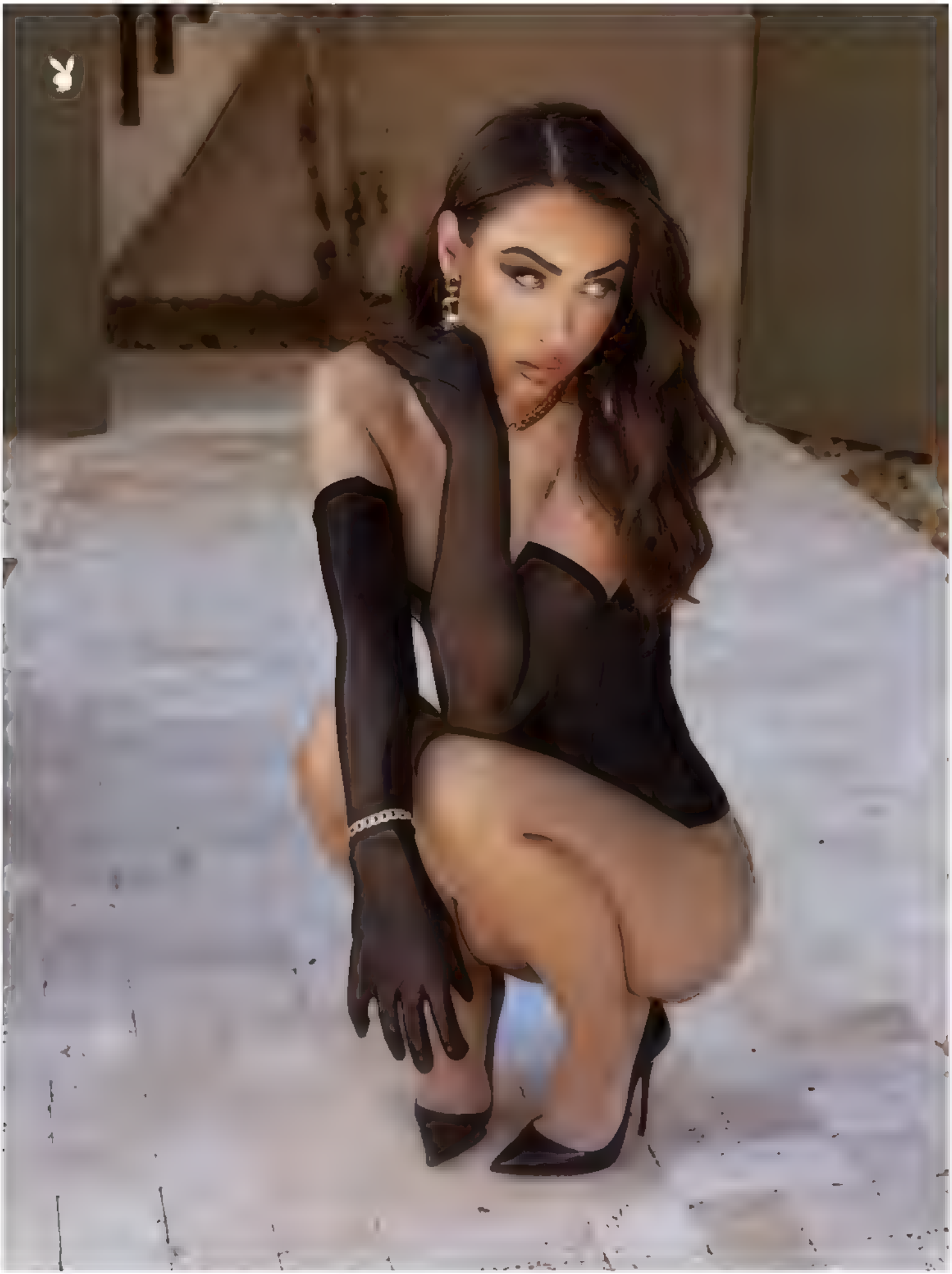
He allows a laugh and dives back in. "I had time to think about why we create these structures. Why do I have to pledge allegiance in a way that minimizes my individuality? I kind of started to rebel, and in diving deep and thinking about it all I still realized how necessary it is for people to have community, especially people who are marginalized and rejected by mainstream society. Community was and is a protective measure, and I think it really helped me empathize a lot better, even if the ways they built community can be unhealthy and damaging."

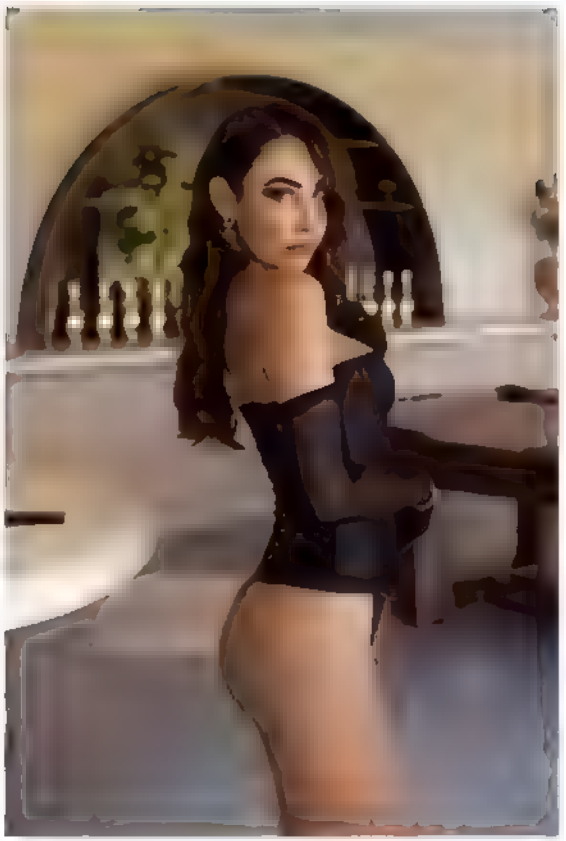
For all his talk of isolation and individuality, Sumney finds himself making a case—a characteristically complex one—for community. That would explain Grae's cast of contributors. It's an irony that reveals itself the more you listen: Without that range of voices, the album would feel less unified. This is the force that pushes Grae beyond a testament to solitude or an exploration of mere duality. Sumney's world contains as many sides as we need in order to encompass our true selves—emotionally, romantically, physically and beyond.

In a way, it's a self-effacing move made by a unmissable man, an openness he hints at as he explains his thinking behind that patchwork of spoken interludes.

"I knew I didn't want to talk on the record," he says. "I knew I needed a way to tie the songs together, because sonically the songs are just so disparate that they needed to blend into each other in order for it to feel like a cohesive experience. And then with those interludes, it was like, Okay, well—people need to talk."

nstagram **@olimarie**





Such an absolute honour to have you on Playboy! Tell us about your daily schedule as a model, do you have a routine? Thank you for having me! In general I have a strict morning routine but each day is very different. When modelling, I would start the day early usually skipping breakfast (and having an iced coffee instead lol) going straight to do hair & makeup, then arriving to location and going over the plan for the day/ shoot with the photographer and stylist etc.

How do you like to begin your day? I like to do a 45-1hr walk along the beach, dissociate from reality then go and have breakfast at my fav cafe organise my day

What are some of your biggest dreams you hope to achieve? I have goals not dreams and they're very personal I owe myself a lot Being on the cover of a magazine was definitely one of them – I hope all my exes know it was just the start

What helps you decompress and relax? I feel like my level of "relaxed" is still somewhat not to others, I always need to be doing something or thinking about doing something

Who has been the most influential person in your life and why? As I've grown up and changed so have the people who influenced me at the time and if it's taught me anything it's to NOT be influenced by other people and to follow your own heart/mind/instincts always.

How romantic are you? I'm actually an old school romantic at heart! It's the little things - handwritten notes, holding a door open, picking me up on a date, the good morning/goodnight messages, small thoughtful gifts etc. I really appreciate someone's efforts and go to a lot of effort for the people I love too. In saying all of this - I hate flowers lol

What is the most memorable date you've ever had? I've always been in relationships so not spent much time "dating" for no reason but if I had to pick just one memorable time it would be eating McDonalds in the car parked at the beach watching the thunderstorm.

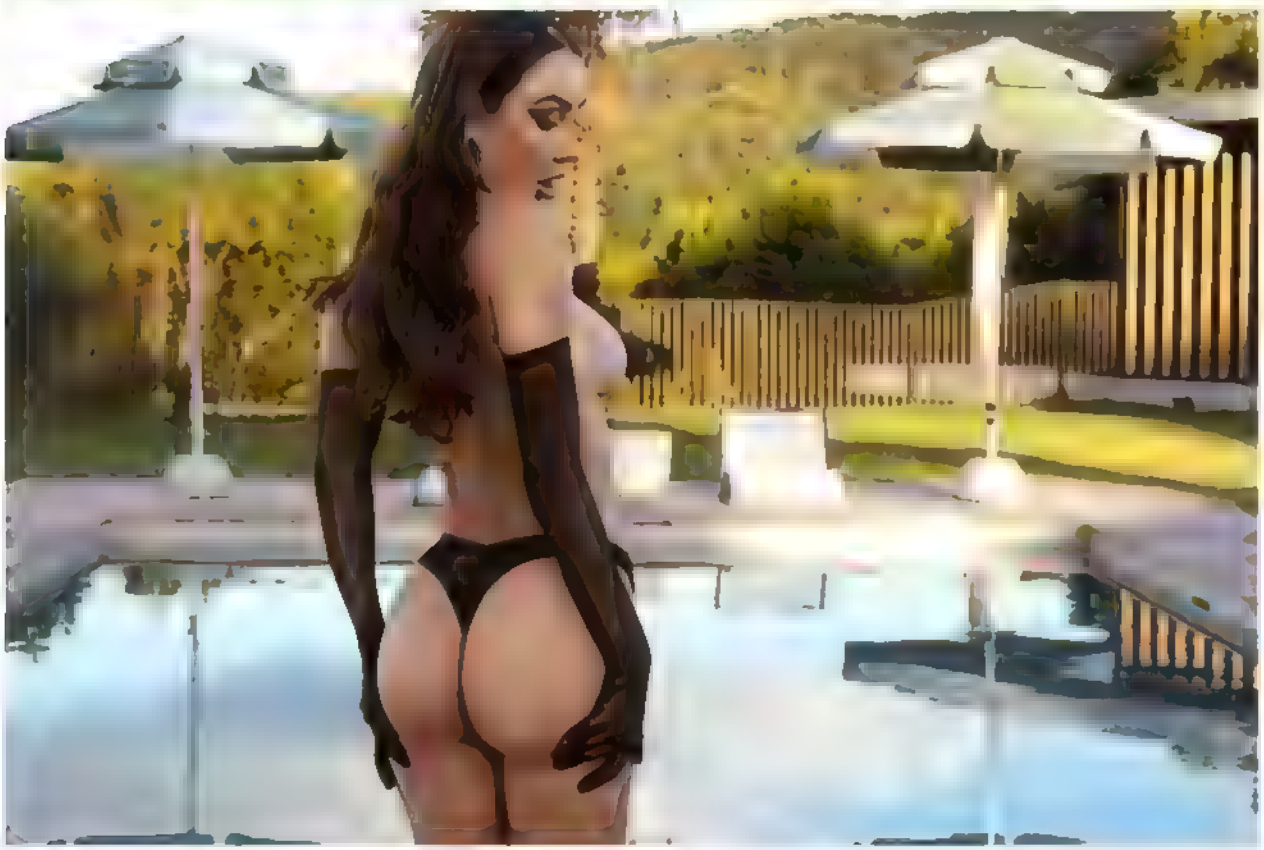
What was the biggest lesson from your worst breakup? That it doesn't matter how good of a woman you are you'll never be good enough for someone who's not ready to be a man

Would you rather be loved, respected or admired? Respected for sure, I think to really love or be loved you need mutual respect. Being admired by people is nice but in reality doesn't mean much if there is no respect

Are you a city traveller or nature explorer? Both! I love looking up new places/restaurants/ shops and going out but I also love being carefree and going on outdoor adventures, beaches, walks, soul searching shit lol

What's on your travel bucket list? Literally the rest of the world – anywhere I haven't already been! I think one thing in life without a doubt is never a waste of time (or money) and that's travelling you never come back the same person you were when you left and I love that

Where can our readers catch up with you and stay updated with your work? On my Instagram



Playboy Interview

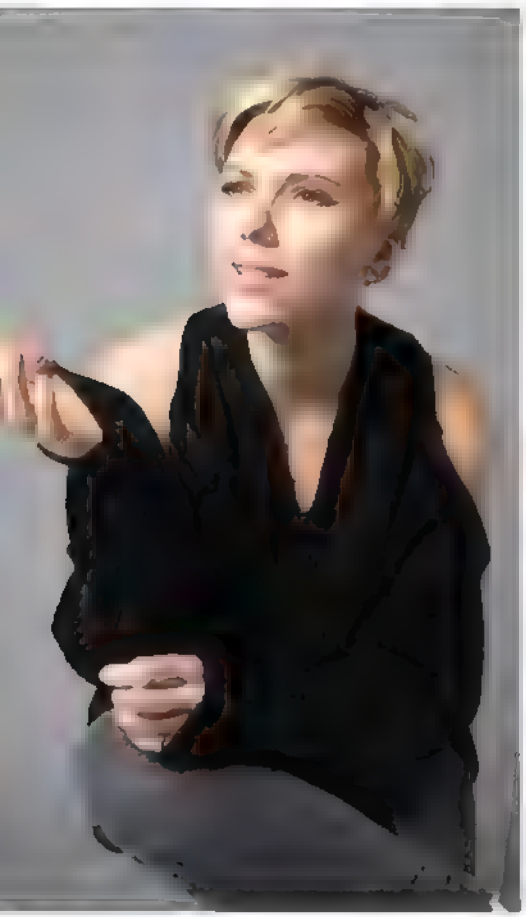
Scarlett Johansson

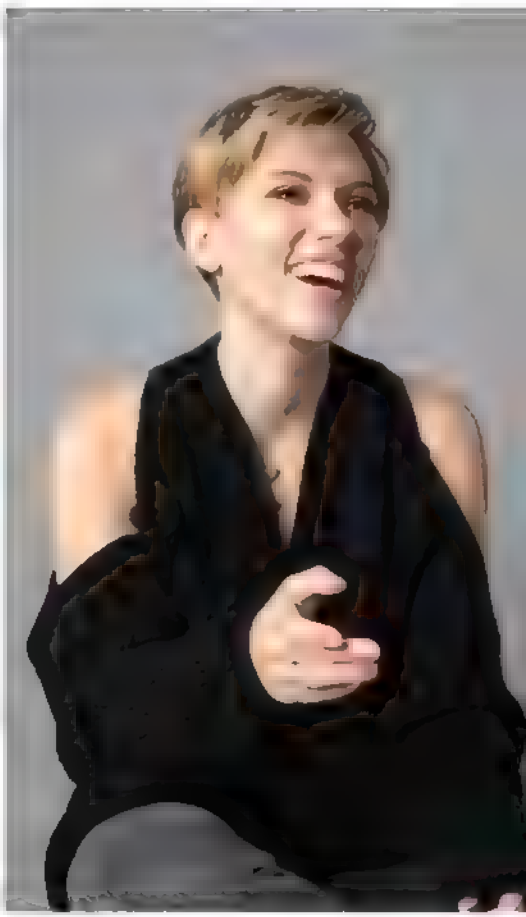
A candid conversation with the stratospheric star about motherhood, monogamy and why she keeps playing lethal superwomen

INTERVIEW BY **AMANDA PETRUSICH** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **JAKE CHESSUM**

The opening sequence of Lost in Translation, Sofia Coppola's 2003 film about two spiritually adrift, jet-lagged Americans finding each other in Tokyo, features a sustained shot of Scarlett Johansson's behind, swaddled in a pair of nearly translucent pink underwear, as she lies on a bed, gazing at a window with the curtains drawn.

Johansson plays Charlotte, a recent college graduate lamenting the trajectory of her life from inside an opulent Japanese hotel, the actress was just 17 when she landed the role. Although she had already been working for almost a decade, her quiet, deliberate performance turned her into one of Hollywood's most sought-after actresses, and in the 14 years since *Lost in Translation* was released, she has served as a muse to auteurs including Woody Allen and the Coen brothers and propped up massive commercial franchises such as *Captain America* and *The Avengers*. Her creative choices have been vast and varied, a mix of blockbusters and art-house experiments: a computer operating system in Spike Jonze's *Her* (a character she gave life to using only that dusky, twilight voice), a 17th century servant to the painter Johannes Vermeer in *Girl With a Pearl Earring*, the girlfriend of a porn addict in *Don Jon*





Hollywood has a strange relationship to certain libidinous energies, and Johansson is compared often and aptly to Marilyn Monroe. The fact of her body seems to supersede everything else. But Johansson is bored by discussions of her physicality, and while Monroe was never quite able to fully steer her own sexuality, Johansson is remarkably self-possessed. To ask her about her good looks is to watch her grow increasingly disinterested. In the past decade, she's also chosen roles—an unnamed, homicidal alien in Jonathan Glazer's Under the Skin, Black Widow, an unforgiving superspy, in the Avengers films, a drug mule who turns superhuman in Luc Besson's Lucy—in which her sexuality is weaponized. Men underestimate her and are punished for it.

Her latest part is Major Motoko Kusanagi in a live-action adaptation of Ghost in the Shell, Mamoru Oshii's beloved 1995 manga film. In Oshii's version, the Major is Japanese, and when Johansson's casting was announced, critics immediately cried whitewashing. Johansson was born in New York City, in 1984, to a Jewish mother from the Bronx and a father from Denmark, and while she is quick to acknowledge Hollywood's grim diversity problem, she is hopeful that the film, directed by Rupert Sanders and shot in New Zealand and Hong Kong, will resolve any questions about the Major's actual origins.

The New Yorker's Amanda Petrusich first connected with Johansson in a cavernous photo studio on the west side of Manhattan. Two weeks after their initial conversation, Johansson would speak at the Women's March on Washington, voicing her firm support for women's reproductive rights. At one point she addressed the new president directly, saying that her daughter "may potentially not have the right to make choices for her body and her future that your daughter Ivanka has been privileged to have." But on this blustery afternoon just days into the new year, writer and subject found an overstuffed leather couch, commandeered a plate of chocolate chip cookies and spoke about Johansson's childhood, career and new life as a mother—she has a two-year-old daughter with French advertising executive Romain Dauriac. (They were wed in 2014, three years after the end of Johansson's brief and high-profile marriage to Ryan Reynolds.)

"She's frank and funny and forthright—a kind of tough-talking New York girl," Petrusich says. "She's also deeply uninterested in bullshit. There's a sense, speaking with her, that you need to be ready to go hard or you'll lose her interest. It immediately made sense to me that Sofia Coppola cast her as a corrective to the bubbly blonde starlet played by Anna Faris in Lost in Translation. She's a deep and naturally contemplative person—with a gaze that draws you in even as it commands you to keep up."

PLAYBOY: You were born and raised in New York City. What was it like to grow up here?

JOHANSSON: New York was different then. That makes me sound like an old geezer, but the city was much more accessible. My group of friends was really diverse. We all came from different socioeconomic backgrounds, and our parents did different things. Some parents were drug dealers, some were working in finance, and we all lived in the same community. While it's still probably the greatest city in the world—I'm biased—I think it used to feel like more was possible here for more people. There's a great leather store down in the West Village that has been there forever. I was there a couple of months ago, and the guy who has been making sandals since 1967 or whatever is fighting his landlord to stay in that space, because it was once rent stabilized and that doesn't exist anymore. In the next couple of years it will probably turn into some corporate business. It's sad, because that's the heartbeat of New York. That's what drove the city, what made things seem possible.

PLAYBOY: Almost everyone I know who grew up in New York City has this lovely quality—not just being exposed to all the different artists working around you but, inevitably, to all these different ways of being, ways of living, ways of seeing the world.

JOHANSSON: And you can be yourself here, or whatever version of yourself you want to be. That's not possible in a lot of other places. I love the idea of raising my daughter here. She's probably exposed to so many more things just going to the playground than almost any other toddler her age growing up in a lot of other places.

PLAYBOY: You had your daughter in 2015?

JOHANSSON: What year are we in? No, 2014—I can't even remember [*laughs*]. She's two and a half now.

PLAYBOY: Do you think motherhood has changed you?

JOHANSSON: Oh, it has changed me, yes. Just the process of being pregnant and giving birth was incredibly profound. Also surrendering to the fact that with babies, and particularly infants and toddlers, you have to let go of your expectations and of whatever instincts you have to take control of the situation. Of course, being a mother, you have to make decisions all the time that affect this person who is completely dependent on you, but you also have to surrender to the experience, and that in itself is really liberating. For me, it's the best thing that has ever happened. Ever. Somebody once described it to me as your heart growing this other chamber, and I think that's really profoundly true. Your capacity to love something, at least in my experience, deepens to a whole other space. I think I

was afraid that life would change, and it does; it dramatically changes. But I feel in a lot of ways more myself now than I did before.

PLAYBOY: That's a beautiful way of talking about it.

JOHANSSON: I understand the importance of my own happiness now more than I did before. Because you see how it affects somebody else, and you're kind of like, If I'm not happy, then I can't be in tip-top shape for this other person.

PLAYBOY: This question is asked incessantly of women and very rarely asked of working fathers, but do you feel parenthood has changed the way you approach your work?

JOHANSSON: Where I want to be working is definitely something. That's just a practical part of it, though I'm fortunately at a place in my career, after 20-whatever years, where I can dictate that a little bit. It will probably get more challenging as she gets older, once she's in school and her life is more established in one place. It's a struggle for a lot of people, because we exist in this weird nomadic industry where almost everybody on a crew has a family, and it's hard. It's hard on relationships; it's hard on your partner, your kids, family in general, friends.

PLAYBOY: Has that been a challenge for you?

JOHANSSON: When I was doing Ghost in the Shell, I was in New Zealand with our daughter for six months. It was so hard: The distance and the weight of the job itself were really hard on me. It was a big movie with a lot happening. I spent all day fighting people—and literally fighting with myself. I was battling with the character. I remember saying to Rupert Sanders several times, "Can one good thing happen to this character? One great moment?" The answer was no. Spoiler alert: It's a fuckin' dark ride for this person, or cyborg or whatever.

PLAYBOY: There was some controversy about your casting as the Major. She's a character a lot of people presumed would be Japanese and therefore would be played by a Japanese actor. Did those conversations trickle down to you?

JOHANSSON: Totally. I think the conversation about diversity in Hollywood is an important one and one that we should be having. My character has the unique experience of being a person whose human brain has been put into what was essentially a synthetic robotic body. I guess I always thought the character was a universal one, in the sense that she has no identity, and the heart of this story is her search for an identity. I hope that whatever questions people have about my casting in this film will be answered by actually seeing the movie. It's hard to say, because you haven't seen the movie yet, and there's a part of it that I don't want to talk about because it's the turning point of the movie, but I think it answers the question for the audience as to who I am, who I was and what my true identity is, and it has nothing to do with how my character looks or how you see me.

PLAYBOY: On a more personal level, there's also the challenge of disappearing into another person, or disappearing into the project itself, and having to forcibly disconnect from the people around you. It's not a burden that can be shared.

JOHANSSON: Totally, because oftentimes you don't even really know where within you it's coming from. I think that's part of the beauty of the job. What I'm more and more curious about, and more confident in exploring, are all these weird spaces within ourselves, these little nooks and crannies, things that at one time seemed embarrassing to try. When you realize the freedom you feel when you unlock that, and when you're able to get weird and take up lots of space emotionally and then pull back—if you can do that within a single performance, it's a transformative experience.

PLAYBOY: Let's talk about your family. Your father is Danish and your mother is from the Bronx. What kind of parents were they?

JOHANSSON: After having two kids and then trying for a third and getting two more—I have a twin brother, and we were the last—I think they surrendered whatever rule book they had been following, if any. That's probably normal. By the time you get to your younger kids, you're more lax, you worry over fewer things, you're more comfortable as a parent. I think my brother and I probably benefited from that in some ways and didn't in others. My mom had moved to California and was kind of remotely there, and my dad was consumed by the responsibility of being at home with us and all that it meant to provide for us. My parents always struggled financially, so that was a huge burden for him. By the time we were 13, my brother and I were almost raising ourselves. I was still living at home and going to school and stuff, but I was working, and New York is—I was out and about and hanging out and getting into trouble pretty early on. Not too much trouble, thankfully. I self-regulated, but I could have probably gone really far down the rabbit hole had I not always had something guiding me.

PLAYBOY: What do you think that was? Work?

JOHANSSON: Yeah. I had a good work ethic. I had my own sense of self-preservation, and I made it to graduation and got my own place when I was 18.

PLAYBOY: What about dating at that age—anything you know now that you wish you'd known in your early 20s?

JOHANSSON: I never dated anyone, so I'm a bad person to ask for advice. I did go on one blind date, and when I arrived, my date had already taken a shot of tequila in his eye. I didn't even know that was possible. What a turnoff. I would never want to be in my early 20s again, though I did a lot of fun stuff. I wish I knew that everything changes and that nothing is forever—except death. It probably would've freed up a lot of space in my brain.

PLAYBOY: What did your father do for a living?

JOHANSSON: My dad was an architect.

PLAYBOY: And your mom?

JOHANSSON: My mom started managing me when I was about eight or nine. She was kind of overseeing things prior to that, but she really started managing me when I was around that age—or maybe a little bit older, like 12. She did that until I stopped working with her when I was in my early 20s. My mom is very ambitious, and she's also good at multitasking. She has a lot of life force, my mom. I definitely inherited that from her. My dad is more—I don't know, I think my dad in a lot of ways is kind of a dreamer. He's such a creative person, but at times I think he can almost be self-limiting.

"I'm ambitious, I guess. If I see something in the distance and I want it, I'll sprint toward it."

Whereas my mom, I think, always saw a bigger picture, and I probably got that from her

PLAYBOY: How was he self-limiting?

JOHANSSON: I think he didn't have as much confidence. He had a complicated relationship with his father. Even though he could dream big, he never had the confidence to push the boundaries. And my mom, when I was growing up, always told me—told all of us, actually—that if we wanted something we had to go and get it for ourselves and that nobody would do it for us. That really stuck with me. Though I think I'm a little bit more forgiving than that. I probably work better in a team than she does, and I really appreciate the collaborative spirit. I think part of that is from working on productions for such a long time and seeing how one hand holds the other and how important it is to have a healthy morale within a group of people in a professional setting. I'm ambitious, I guess. If I see something in the distance and I want it, I'll sprint toward it.

PLAYBOY: I would think there might be something advantageous about coming into your own as an artist relatively early, because there's a self-confidence or self-possession we all have as children that just gets chipped away the longer you exist in the world.

JOHANSSON: Yeah, I think that's interesting. You go to high school and then you go to college and then you're about to graduate and you go, "Well, I don't want to do this." And then you're interning somewhere, and it's not something you really want to do. You don't really have any work experience, you haven't had this kind of time in the field. And then you go back to graduate school for something else, because you realize that you need a master's degree to do whatever it is you decided you want to do, and then, you know, people get married and have kids, and life just takes a different path. I think when you work from a young age, you have time to hone—craft is such a crappy word, but it's true. You hone a craft and things get pared away. You cut the fat away earlier on, and you're more focused on what is within that's actually driving you.

PLAYBOY: It's such a gift to know what you want.

JOHANSSON: It's true. Otherwise, you get suffocated by the possibilities. I think that's what happens. Everything is possible, especially in this country. We're so spoiled that way—sometimes too much is possible, and that's why people panic. They don't want to fail at anything, so they just stop. They stop reaching.

PLAYBOY: That's a very American idea, the fear of failure. We prize success above all else. There's no power in admitting fault or failure or uncertainty.

JOHANSSON: It's something Barack Obama has—humility. It's such a lovely quality. There are a lot of things about him that will be missed, but humility is such an important part of being successful at what you do.

PLAYBOY: And being able to learn.

JOHANSSON: I actually think it will become very apparent that a leader cannot be successful if they don't have that—if they're not able to be vulnerable, curious, compassionate, to have that kind of humility. I don't think you can lead in any field without having those qualities. That's what makes a leader, I think: the ability to learn from mistakes and to have compassion for your fellow man.

PLAYBOY: You campaigned for Barack Obama twice and supported Hillary Clinton in the recent election. How have you been coping with recent events?

JOHANSSON: You know, it's funny. I had dinner with Woody Allen right after the election, so it was in November. We were both like, "Okay, the election. That's our topic before we get deep into what the meaning of life is." And I said, "Please don't tell me you're one of those people who was like, 'I told you so.' Please don't tell me that." And he was like, "Honestly, I was shocked. I would have thought that he would not have won one state." And I thought, Okay, well, if Woody felt that way, it makes me feel better about being as ignorant as I was, because I literally—I mean, it was a complete and utter shock. I had a very strange experience voting. I took my kid with me, and I was like, "Kid, we got a female president, which is pretty exciting. And it's Hillary Clinton, that's also cool, and we're good." Then I got on a plane to Hong Kong, which is a 16-hour flight. I had two glasses of wine and passed out. I woke up 10 hours later, and the stewardess was like, "Excuse me, Miss, would you like to know the election results?" I looked at her and said, "Well, I know it's—okay, what? Give me the news. Let me have it. What is it? I think I know it's Clinton." And she was like, "No, it's actually Trump." I thought, This is a Twilight Zone episode.

> "We are talking about normalizing what is by definition a normal thing: the accessibility of women's health care. Everyone with a vagina needs it.

PLAYBOY: You thought she was kidding.

JOHANSSON: I mean, I'm shutting through the air at 30,000 feet. The whole cabin is dark, my brother is passed out, and I tap him on the shoulder—he was a field organizer for Obama, he's very political—and I say, "Hunter, wake up, wake up!" He was like, "What?" I said, "Trump won." He was like, "Oh, stop it." God, he got so drunk when we landed in Hong Kong. This morning I was listening to NPR, and I have these moments when it still hits me, the weight of it.

PLAYBOY: Tell me about your experience at the Women's March on Washington.

JOHANSSON: As you know, I'm not one to overshare, but I felt very driven to say what I had to say. It was both a grounding experience and an out-of-body one. Paradoxical, I guess. I always took Planned Parenthood for granted growing up. That's how it should be, right? We are talking about normalizing what is by definition a normal thing: the accessibility of women's health care. Everyone with a vagina needs it. Why are we still having these conversations so many years after we, as women, were supposedly "liberated"? I'm over it.

PLAYBOY: Are there things you do to manage feelings of hopelessness or fear?

JOHANSSON: Well, one thing—you just can't be complacent. I think it's hard because people have been inactive for such a long time, and we don't have a draft. Not that I'm advocating for that, but if there were some kind of mandatory service, I think it would be a completely different political climate. People would be much more proactive—not just opinionated but proactive. It's hard to mobilize people when they don't feel—I mean, look at this past election: Nobody voted. There was a record low turnout. I blame the media for a lot of that too. Early polling results and that stuff should just be banned. I think people just got complacent. They were like, "Who cares?"

PLAYBOY: That leads me to a tangent about music. You're a singer as well as an actor, and you've made two records. In 2008 you released Anywhere I Lay My Head, a collection of covers of Tom Waits songs. As we're speaking of America writ large, it occurs to me that Waits is one of our best representative voices—on his records he becomes a vital, exciting and endearing embodiment of this place. Tell me about your relationship to his work.

JOHANSSON: He's a true poet. And he's an artist in that most delicious way, where his self-expression gives us a place to be reflective. Rhino came to me to do an album. I mean, who has that opportunity? It was amazing. I was overwhelmed. I thought, Maybe I'll do classics, maybe I'll do Cole Porter songs. Then I was like, I really want to do that duet Tom Waits does with Bette Midler called "I Never Talk to Strangers." And then I thought, Maybe I'll just reimagine Tom Waits songs and see where that leads me. I tried doing it with various producers, and it just was not working. That's when I got, very fatefully, to Dave Sitek from TV on the Radio. He had this Tinkerbell-cough-syrup idea for the album, and so we just ran with it. Meeting Dave was life-changing because he became a really important figure in my life and a dear, dear friend. And going to Louisiana to record was an absolutely epic experience. I was falling in love with my first husband at the time. It was just a very romantic and really liberating time. It was great.

PLAYBOY: That sounds incredible.

JOHANSSON: It was wonderful.

PLAYBOY: Another interesting thing about Waits's work is that so much of it is about his particular, singular performance of those songs. But because of that, I feel there's a lot of meat left on the bone, in a way, for a different singer to come in and totally reimagine them.

JOHANSSON: Yeah, it's true. It's funny because if you try to recreate the song as Waits did it, you realize he actually has a very classical approach. I'm not talking about the really experimental stuff that he does, but the instrumental parts of his songs can be very sentimental. It's his voice that gives them such depth.

PLAYBOY: You and Dave got in a car and drove together from California to Louisiana.

JOHANSSON: Yeah, it was crazy, because we didn't know each other at all, and we figured we would get to know each other on this road trip. I think I drove.

PLAYBOY: That's so high-stakes!

JOHANSSON: I remember picking him up in Silver Lake or whatever, and he had seven cigarettes in each hand, a cup of black coffee and a bunch of weird instruments I had never heard of, and we just loaded up the trunk and here we go. We drove into the desert and smoked a bunch of pot and got weird. We just sat on the hood of the car and stared into the sunset.

PLAYBOY: You mentioned Waits being one of our great poets. Were you pleased when Bob Dylan won the Nobel Prize for literature?

JOHANSSON: Yeah, that was cool. I love that he didn't show up too. That's very Dylanesque. Dylan is someone you can revisit at different times in your life and his songs mean something different to you at each stage. He's a wonderful artist and poet and a mysterious magician.

PLAYBOY: You starred in one of his music videos.

JOHANSSON: My friend Bennett Miller was asked to direct a video for him. I was going to do it with Dylan, and then he didn't want to be in the video, so we just kind of did our own thing. About two years later, I went to see Dylan for the first time. I saw him backstage, and he said something to me like "Oh yeah, thanks for the video you did." I expected when we did the video that he would come at us, that I would hear from him—no, not at all. He just kind of remembered it on the fly, like, Oh yeah, you did that video for me. It was my pleasure, Mr. Dylan. My friend told me this hysterical story about how a friend of theirs, a music producer, was like, "I'm bringing a friend to dinner," and it was Dylan, which is crazy. Dylan was wearing a hoodie, and he had pulled the string so only his eyes and nose were showing. And he sat through the entire dinner like that. He kept having to pull his hoodie down so he could shove forkfuls of food into his mouth.

PLAYBOY: God bless him. Your second record, Break Up, was a collaboration with Pete Yorn, who has said that he was inspired by Serge Gainsbourg's recordings with Brigitte Bardot. Is the duet format something that appeals to you?

JOHANSSON: Yeah, duets are great. When I was a kid I listened to Louis Armstrong, Ella Fitzgerald, Dean Martin with various singers, the Andrews Sisters. I think I particularly like to hear a male and a female voice together. Pete was like, "Hey, want to make an album?" I think he was in a dark place, or a transitional place in his life, and he had a dream that we made an album together, so he texted me when he came out of his fever dream, and that's how we decided to make it.

PLAYBOY: The record does have a dreamy quality—there's an ache to it. Do you remember your dreams?

JOHANSSON: I do, yeah.

PLAYBOY: Any recurring anxiety dreams?

JOHANSSON: I only have anxiety dreams! I once told my mother that and she cried. I have a lot of dreams about houses—beautiful, ancient houses filled with gardens and hanging vines that I at one time had the opportunity to live in but sold. Whatever. I'm sure the heating bills would have been outrageous.

PLAYBOY: I think part of getting older is reckoning with that idea that there's so much we don't know and might never know about ourselves. Dreams are the most immediate way to glimpse those weird, vast expanses of your subconscious that you can't otherwise access.

JOHANSSON: It's true. Of course, because you have all these barriers that shut you down from—I mean, I think it's probably a survival thing that you go about your day and remember glimpses of dreams that you've had. I think examining your dreams can really help you to be more present in your waking life, because then you know better what's going on with you.

PLAYBOY: Every once in a while someone will do you a great service by saying something revelatory to you, about you—and of course you're like, "Fuck you, you don't know me." Then you go home and think about it and you're like, Oh my God, they're exactly right.

JOHANSSON: I was listening to this TED Talk about relation

ships, and the person who was giving the talk was saying that in moments when you're starting a new relationship and your friends and family say, "No, this is a red flag. This person is not for you"—why do we ignore those people who know us so well in the moments that we don't? And then we distance ourselves from them because we're embarrassed or whatever. It's interesting how sometimes all you need is your good friend to tell you that you're not acting like yourself. Or that they see something in front of you that is not beneficial for you or true to who you actually are. I don't know. It's so easy to just go, "No, I don't want to hear that."

PLAYBOY: Well, love is so deeply intoxicating at first. You're just out of your mind.

JOHANSSON: Of course.

PLAYBOY: No one can tell you anything.

JOHANSSON: And the part of your brain that functions then is a dysfunctional part—it's not the rational side of your brain. It's the addictive part of your brain that fires up when you have those first feelings of love, and it's so good.

PLAYBOY: You've said that you aren't sure humans are designed to be monogamous.

JOHANSSON: Well, with every gain there's a loss, right? So that's a loss. You have to choose a path. I think the idea of marriage is very romantic; it's a beautiful idea, and the practice of it can be a very beautiful thing. I don't think it's natural to be a monogamous person. I might be skewered for that, but I think it's work. It's a lot of work. And the fact that it is such work for so many people—for everyone—the fact of that proves that it is not a natural thing. It's something I have a lot of respect for and have participated in, but I think it definitely goes against some instinct to look beyond.

PLAYBOY: And of course many marriages don't work out.

JOHANSSON: I think marriage initially involves a lot of people who have nothing to do with your relationship, because it's a legally binding contract, and that has a weight to it. Being married is different than not being married, and anybody who tells you that it's the same is lying. It changes things. I have friends who were together for 10 years and then decided to get married, and I'll ask them on their wedding day or right after if it's different, and it always is. It is. It's a beautiful responsibility, but it's a responsibility.

PLAYBOY: You were married for the second time in 2014. Did you wake up the next morning and feel different?

JOHANSSON: Yeah, definitely. It felt different. I had a really young baby at the time, so that also—our family dynamic was just different. I don't know. Whatever that is, the thing you can't fully put words to, it changed.

PLAYBOY: And it felt different from your prior marriage too?

JOHANSSON: Yeah, of course. I had a baby, and also my husband was coming from another country and becoming a citizen of this country. It was a huge transition for both of us, and certainly for him—moving here, committing to the States. But I think my husband has embraced America, and New York in particular, in this really endearing way. He was making meatballs the other night, actually. I wasn't home. I was away, and he sent me a picture. He was like, "I'm a real New Yorker, and I love The Sopranos!" I was just, "You go, babe."

PLAYBOY: Are you based in New York now, or are you still moving back and forth between here and Paris?

JOHANSSON: We still mix it up. My job takes me all over the place, so I don't even know where I live, but I guess now we're kind of committed to living here because with our daughter we have to commit to someplace. She'll be in school in a hot minute. The time passes like crazy.

PLAYBOY: What do you think you'd be doing if you weren't acting?

JOHANSSON: Oh gosh, I don't know. I probably would have gone into some kind of medical profession. I'd be rooting around in somebody else! I'm interested in people.

PLAYBOY: They're such different disciplines, but they both rely on a kind of intuition.

JOHANSSON: I could have been a dermatologist. I would have actually loved being a dermatologist. That's a dream job. All my friends are like, "What is this weird thing on me?" And I'm like, "Let me see it!" But I don't think I could do seven years of schooling.

PLAYBOY: I'm also not sure that Hollywood would let you go so easily.

JOHANSSON: Oh, I don't know. There's always someone else to fill the void.

PLAYBOY: I read recently that you were the highest-grossing actor of 2016.

JOHANSSON: I make a lot of movies that have a huge built-in audience, and that drives a lot of it. But it's been a very productive few years.

PLAYBOY: Surveying your body of work, there's an interesting mix of independent, idiosyncratic films and then these intensely commercial franchise movies. Do you try to keep those things in balance?

JOHANSSON: I always hoped to have that balance, and I've finally achieved it. I loved what Jon Favreau did with Iron Man, how he worked with actors like Robert Downey, who I've loved for such a long time. I'm not normally a comic book fan. I liked the Tim Burton Batman movies, but it's not my genre. Yet Favreau seemed to find this balance that you're talking about—an independent creative spirit with the budget of something so ambitious. It was unprecedented. It was a new way of telling that story. And it obviously rang true, because then DC and studios like Warner Bros. started doing it too. Look at the Suicide Squad cast—we've seen Will Smith in these blockbusters, but casting somebody like Jared Leto as the Joker? It's a really welcome trend, I think.

PLAYBOY: Do you read reviews of your films or interviews with you in magazines?

JOHANSSON: Yeah, I do. I do read reviews and interviews. I

"I don't think it's natural to be a monogamous person. I might be skewered for that, but I think it's work."

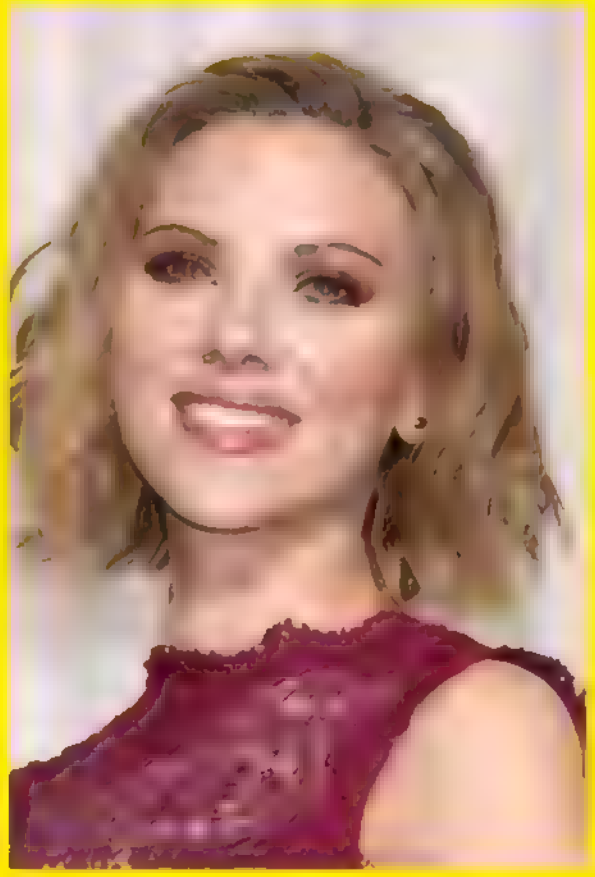
don't search high and low for reviews, but The New York Times, the trades—I'm curious about that stuff. It's helpful, and I like to participate in the process that way. I will always have my own opinion about something that I'm doing, not necessarily of my own performance but of the film in general. And it's probably similar to whatever your response was at the time! Good or bad. I'm like, "Yup, I didn't expect it to suck either." There have been very few times when I did something I loved and nobody else liked it. Most of the time I'm like, "Yeah ..."

PLAYBOY: Filmmaking is so collaborative. There are so many moving parts, and you're often just one of them. I imagine it must be heartbreaking when you see something you've made——

JOHANSSON: And it didn't turn out how you wanted.

PLAYBOY: And who knows whose fault it was?

JOHANSSON: I know whose fault it was! Of course, oh my God. Other times I've made movies that were really successful and I had no idea why. There are some nice surprises. For instance, when we made Lost in Translation, nobody could really see what Sofia Coppola's vision would be. We were making it in this weird fever of jet lag, in this new environment, and we shot it in 27 days. Lance Acord, our director of photography, may have been one of the only ones who could see what we were capturing. When I read the script, I didn't know. I was just kind of doing my thing with Bill Murray, just experiencing what the character was experiencing. And then it came out and it resonated with so many people. I never could have predicted that.



PLAYBOY: You were just 17 when you were cast in that movie. What's your experience of watching it now?

JOHANSSON: I haven't seen it in so long. I would probably think, Oh my God, I'm so young.

PLAYBOY: Your character, Charlotte, is 25 in the film and searching.

JOHANSSON: I had been working for almost a decade at that time. I was in a much older circle of friends and colleagues. That sort of yearning for purpose—I had maybe a greater understanding of what that felt like than other high school seniors.

PLAYBOY: Robert Redford, who directed you in The Horse Whisperer, described you as "13 going on 30." Have you always been an old soul?

JOHANSSON: I don't know. Like I said, I was taking care of myself from when I was pretty young. In a lot of ways I had to be responsible for myself.

PLAYBOY: Anthony Lane, who is a very esteemed film critic, wrote a profile of you that readers thought was so fawning it spawned several negative response pieces. I'm not suggesting this is the case with Lane, who I think is an intelligent and thoughtful writer, but there's certainly a history of male magazine reporters approaching beautiful young starlets in ways that feel limiting, if not absurd.

JOHANSSON: Women do it too, though. I've also experienced that with female journalists. I think they project. They have this strange way of comparing themselves to this idea of you. I'll read articles written by women about other women in which they say, "That perfect blowout reminded me of the fact that I hadn't showered in four days," or whatever. It's not only hollow, it's uninteresting. Maybe it's just more of a failure in approach—instead of getting to the heart of someone, what drives them creatively, you just scratch the surface. I also find interviews a lot of the time to be very boring. Not this interview; this interview is not boring, but you're also lovely to talk to. When interviewers are self-deprecating, it becomes this weird—I don't know, it can be exhausting at times.

PLAYBOY: People do sometimes write about you as if you've just drifted down in a beam of light.

JOHANSSON: Nice!

PLAYBOY: It must be hard to bear the weight of those projections.

JOHANSSON: I think it's actually ridiculous. It's absurd. Also, I have a lot of experiences where I'm like, "I can't believe this is happening to me." I'm still surprised by my job and the places it carries me. But my day-to-day life is a regular routine.

PLAYBOY: Not to sound dystopian or paranoid, but it increasingly feels as though in the future privacy will be our currency. We're all being rather cavalier about it right now—I'm being tracked all the time by this thing in my pocket, I'm giving all my information to corporations, and it's fine.

JOHANSSON: I couldn't agree with you more, having experienced that.

PLAYBOY: You had your e-mail hacked in 2011.

JOHANSSON: Yeah, that was crazy. It made me realize how vulnerable anyone is to that. The person who hacked my e-mail did

the same thing to 50 other people in the public eye and also to his ex-girlfriends—it could happen to anybody. And of course we're so cavalier about that. People are like, "Oh, who cares about me." But you're just as vulnerable.

PLAYBOY: I think almost anyone's e-mail would betray some bad behavior.

JOHANSSON: Well, it's just your personal life. Even if it's letters you wrote to your best friend, your sister, whatever, it's your personal stuff. It's like a journal. It's pretty crazy.

PLAYBOY: You've stayed off social media.

JOHANSSON: I just never got on that bandwagon. I don't even call people back. I don't even check my voice mail. It's not in my nature. I get it; it's a great tool for a lot of companies, a lot of causes. I don't know. I haven't missed it in my life at all.

PLAYBOY: Why open that door?

JOHANSSON: I don't have space for it in my life. If I had any kind of social media account, I would have to rely on somebody else to run it, and that seems like a ridiculous extra thing I don't need or want. I already read too much news on my phone. A couple of days ago my phone died, and I didn't have a phone for 20 hours, and it was wonderful. I was so thrilled. It may have been the first time in my life I wasn't panicked to not have my phone. I was just like, "This is great!" I had my kid with me. I was like, "I don't need anything. I got my kid, I'm good."

PLAYBOY: I suspect you were perhaps at the very tail end of the last generation of actresses who came of age professionally somewhat free of the scrutiny under which young women are held now.

JOHANSSON: Yes, I was. You see some young actors performing, and you can tell that they're aware of how they're supposed to be, how the public sees them and what kind of persona they're supposed to convey. And that is unfortunate.

PLAYBOY: Tell me a little about your process as you prepare for a new role.

JOHANSSON: I start by trying to find some physicality to the character that I can hold and return to. Whether that's a self-consciousness, like a person who is worried about aging, or maybe it's somebody who, like the Major, has no sense of her own. She knows her physical body, but she has no care or awareness of her self.

PLAYBOY: That's also true of the women you play in Under the Skin and Her. Each of those characters is essentially just a disembodied consciousness.

JOHANSSON: With Her I actually had a hyper-awareness of myself because I was stuck in a black box. It's just my voice, and so you become hyperaware of certain habits. Doing the sex scene with Joaquin was an exercise in letting go.

PLAYBOY: Was it embarrassing?

JOHANSSON: I think he was really uncomfortable at first. He was so agitated, and it was really interesting to see him. It was probably easier for me because I had been in a black box for such a long time that I was like, "Bring it. I'm warmed up. Come on, let's get weird." In a black box you get this sense that nobody can see you, so you can be whomever you want. You can be yourself. But it was interesting to see how he reacted to it. He came around, though, and we did it—literally, we did it. But the physicality is where I start, just being aware of how this story, these lines, what does it feel like in me, what does it feel like in my body, and then why am I having this physical instinct to be close with somebody or apart from them or self-conscious about this thing or that. In the case of Under the Skin, how can I be completely free of any of these and just be purely instinctive and animal? Or in Ghost in the Shell, I don't have any of these physical tics, these things that make us human. I'm devoid of those things, so what does that leave me with? What does this body feel like that's not my own? There was a separation between her mind and her body, so she had to think and then act on it. These kinds of things get me started. And then of course there's research. Even when I was playing Janet Leigh in Hitchcock, you just think about how she stands, and what it says about her strength, this fiery, driven person. The physicality is where it starts, and then it grows from there.

> "I'll read articles written by women about other women in which they say, 'That perfect blow-out reminded me of the fact that I hadn't showered in four days,' or whatever. It's not only hollow, it's uninteresting."

PLAYBOY: For me, one of the reasons you and Bill Murray are so satisfying to watch in Lost in Translation is because you share a subtle approach to the material. I think the word that gets used is underreactive. You don't seem afraid of silence or a blank stare.

JOHANSSON: I think it's really important for me to take time. The audience will stay with you. They'll ride the wave with you. That's the best part about doing live theater—having the reaction, the feedback from the audience, because it's so informative. It's just absolute magic when the audience and you are riding the same wave.

PLAYBOY: You starred in the Broadway revivals of Arthur Miller's A View From the Bridge and Tennessee Williams's Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, both such rich and complicated plays. Growing up

in New York, was being on Broadway an early dream of yours?
JOHANSSON: That was my absolute dream. That's what drove me to acting. I wanted to do theater and be on Broadway. I wanted desperately to be in theater when I was eight. I wanted to be in musical theater, which I would never do now, ever. If I had to sing and dance in front of people, I would absolutely melt, fail miserably. But you have so many chances to get it right. You can get really weird, and you know that this is the only audience that will see it.
PLAYBOY: You've played so many characters who start out one way—unfeeling, unknowing—and grow into something or someone else via their interactions with others or their observations of the world. I'm sure you're seeing some version of this unfold for your daughter now too—a broadening. Do you think we're all constantly changing into new iterations of ourselves?
JOHANSSON: I don't know. It might be interesting to play somebody who stays stuck. I don't know if it would be interesting to watch. Maybe it is. There's something really powerful about somebody who can't change themselves or doesn't want to change themselves. If you watch something like Barry Lyndon or think of a character like Dorian Gray, there's something really amazing about those characters. To watch the demise of somebody who doesn't want to or is incapable of changing. I'd like to get there, because it probably would help me understand a lot of people in my life. Maybe that will be the next thing for me. But up until this point, I think I've been trying to wrap my head around metamorphosis. Maybe now I've gotten to a stage where I can finally play that person who cannot change.
PLAYBOY: It seems there's a lot of possibility there for an actor.
JOHANSSON: It's so delicious, because I'm innately somebody who's curious about myself and trying to figure it out. My therapist would say, "Well, you make the same mistakes, so don't make them anymore." I don't want to make them anymore! But in life we make the same mistakes again and again, and—
PLAYBOY: And then one day you don't?
JOHANSSON: And then you don't. That's the hope. But it's so interesting when a person keeps making the same mistake or is unwilling to change.
PLAYBOY: I believe I know some of those people intimately.
JOHANSSON: Oh, I thought I dated all of them! Were there any left for you?

"I have a lot of experiences where I'm like, "I can't believe this is happening to me." I'm still surprised by my job and the places it carries me."

MOLLY
ESKAM

Eskam is such an exotic name, what is your ethnic background? Yes, I actually get asked that all the time. My ethnic background includes German, Irish and Norwegian.

Where do you reside today? I reside in sunny San Diego, CA.

Favorite music artist of all time? It has to be Michael Jackson.

Favorite movie: The good old classic Titanic, of course!

Favorite actor? My favorite actor is Leonardo DiCaprio.

Read the book or watch the movie? I prefer to read the book as there is something so special about reading the book and developing your own visuals.

Do you prefer the beach or pool? I prefer the beach. Living in San Diego, makes the beach feels like home to me.

Favorite weather season? Of course, it has to be the summer! I'm sure that you could have guessed that. I love bikinis, the beach and the beautiful weather.

Are you athletic? If so, what's your favorite sport? Yes. I ran track in high school and I still run almost every day!

Describe your perfect man. My perfect man? Mmm...he has to be funny. Also, he has to laugh at my jokes and be carefree, kind and spontaneous.

Describe your perfect date. Pick me up, don't tell me where we are going. Take me to dinner and afterwards walk around, get lost somewhere and find ourselves kissing on a beach and looking out at the ocean.

Favorite body part on you? Favorite body part on a man? Since I love to laugh, my favorite body part on me is my smile. On a man, it absolutely has to be his heart!

Favorite sexual position? Mmm... any position once I find my Prince Charming.

Tell us something about you that not too many people know. Not many people know that I love to read!

Describe yourself using only 3 adjectives. Fun, adventurous, and lovable.

If you can change any one thing about you, what would it be? One thing? Mmm... it would have to be my sass! Sometimes I can get a tad bit too spicy.

If you can change any one thing in the world (anything), what would it be? World hunger.

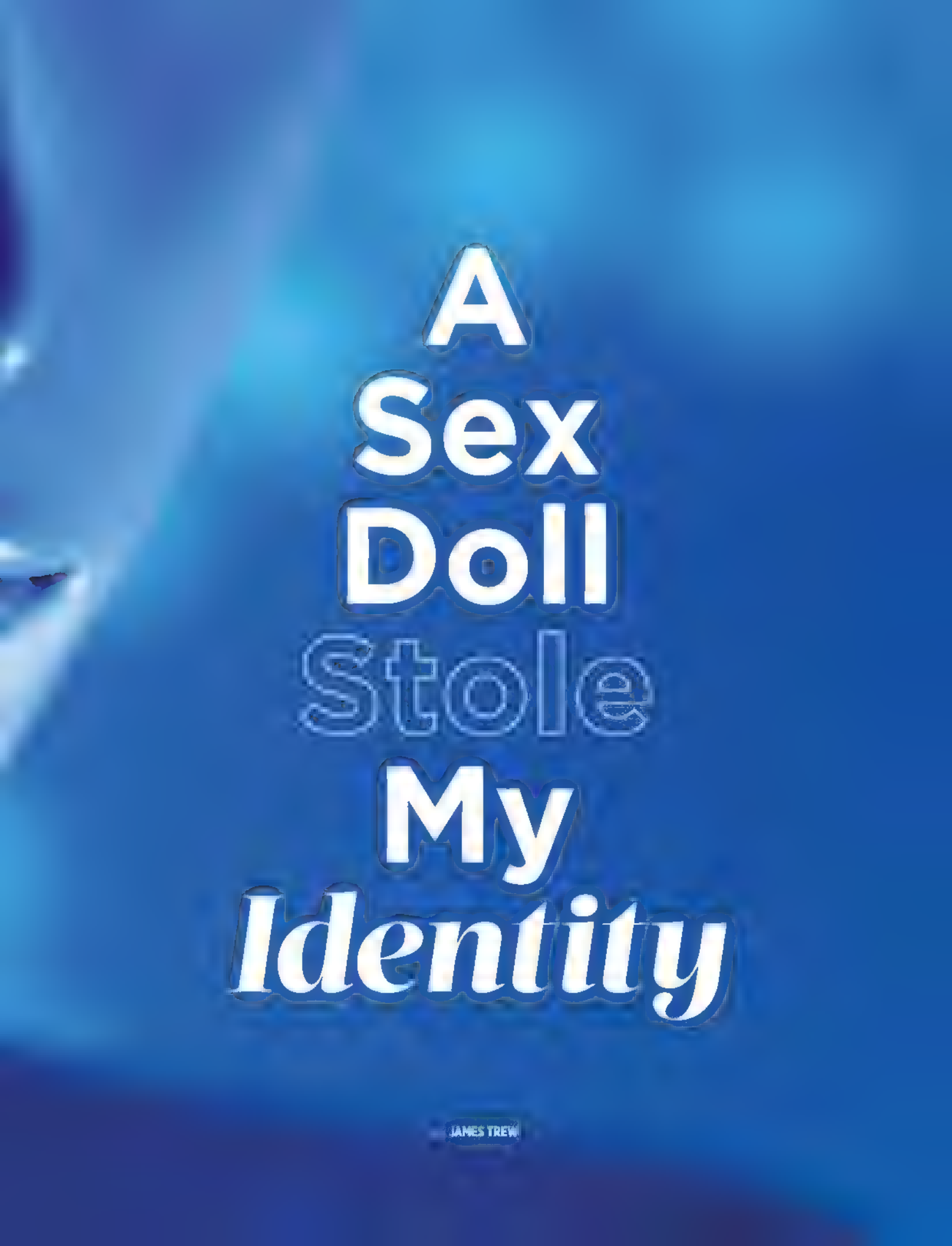
Do you like to travel? Where is your favorite vacation destination? Yes! I love to travel anywhere with sunshine. My favorite place that I have traveled to is Monaco.

What would you consider to be your biggest challenge as a model so far? Every endeavor has its challenges, but since modeling has always been my dream, I just feel incredibly lucky and blessed to get to do what I love and therefore I do not look at any aspect of modeling as a challenge.

Congratulations on your Playboy South Africa feature! This is now your 3rd publishing for Playboy. What does this mean to you? It means everything! As a little girl, I always thought Playboy models were so glamorous and now that I am older it is surreal to get the honor to be one.

What do you think of when it comes to Playboy and the iconic bunny? The first thing I think of is Marilyn Monroe's cover! Also, the glitz and glam of being a Playboy bunny has held its impact on the world for generations, it is iconic.

Where do you see yourself in 10 years? I honestly have no idea! Maybe I will be traveling the world, growing my brand, and finding someone to fall in love with.


A
Sex
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JAMES TREW

Forget Deepfakes: A sex-toy company in Asia is "borrowing" the likenesses of Instagram influencers—without their consent—to create best-selling dolls

Yael Cohen is five-seven with chestnut hair and a Mediterranean complexion. She's also five-four, blonde and with soft white skin. Sometimes she's five-11, dark-haired and black. Your very own Yael is available to order, in any configuration you like, as long as you have the money.

Only one of those combinations describes the living, breathing Yael Cohen: a popular Instagrammer from Israel. Now 23 years old, she just completed four years of mandatory military service, during which she worked as a software engineer. Like many people her age, Cohen enjoys posting attractive pictures of herself on Instagram. She's worked hard to build a following and enjoys interacting with her fans. As Cohen tells it, she decided to take ownership of her image and her right to feel sexy. This is the internet, of course, so some sexual objectification is unavoidable, but few could have predicted how literal that would be for Cohen.

About a year ago, Cohen received a message from one of her followers. It linked to a forum about sex dolls. When she clicked it, she was met with an eerily familiar face: hers. The thread was started by the doll's maker, and it described a new "model" of head coming soon; this one was a rough prototype. Cohen brushed it off as a coincidence.

Months later, she received another DM. This time there was no mistaking it—the link showed the final doll. Although its likeness to Cohen is subjective, its inspiration is not. It shares her first name and in some pictures sports an ombré wig similar to one Cohen sometimes uses in her posts. In case there was any doubt, the doll's creator proudly explained, "Yael is inspired by this beautiful lady," with links to several of Cohen's Instagram pictures. "How will she satisfy your great fantasy?" he asked. The forum users subsequently explained just how.

The discovery sent Cohen into a spin. Being a woman online already comes with harsh realities, something Cohen and anyone else who identifies as female knows all too well. Being popular on Instagram only raises the stakes—but someone using your face to make a sex doll, with a choice of bodies and a functioning vagina, isn't usually one of them.

"I'm confident with my own body, and I also like to share my thoughts, my points of view, my beliefs," Cohen tells Playboy. "But it's something that nobody teaches you how to react to. After the first shock, I started feeling some complex feelings."

"Complex" is likely an understatement. It's a big leap from typical entitled Instagram comments about how fuckable you are to discovering a physical clone that is, well, actually fuckable.

In the past few years, what it means to be objectified online has shifted dramatically, with the standards for exploitation being dismantled and rebuilt in incomprehensible ways.

Around the end of 2017, Deepfakes emerged. These AI-generated videos could superimpose anyone's face over anyone else's. Needless to say, the technology soon found a spiritual home in porn. Before long, subreddits spilled over with fake Emma Watson and Gal Gadot videos. Look-alike porn actors or run-of-the-mill Photoshops suddenly seemed quaint; you could simply feed an app some images and humiliate women that way instead. In fact, DeepNude, an app that spat out naked images with any face you fed it, served up only female bodies.

Deepfakes may be realistic, but they're virtual. They may live online forever, but they'll soon be replaced with the next "it's just a bit of fun" attack on female privacy. While the personal impact of Deepfakes is not to be dismissed, they're still a visual extension of the male fantasy—a turn-on that you must eventually turn off.

Not only was her likeness taken, but the doll has her name and is directly linked to her. It has built-in marketing, all for the sweet price of zero dollars.

Cohen knows that anyone who buys "Yael" can do whatever they want to her, whenever they want, and there's no DMCA takedown service to stop it. "If I wanted to have nudes, I would have nudes," she says. "If I wanted to have a sex doll, I would have a sex doll. They took my choice away. It's sort of forcing me to show my body naked."

Owners of these dolls frequently share their exploits on the forums. Sexual activity is usually only implied, bar the odd discussion about the merits of a built-in versus a removable vagina or about accurate anus placement. The bulk of what owners share is painfully pedestrian. Photosets depict Yael shopping or maybe enjoying a day in the garden. Sometimes these innocent scenarios seem more invasive—as though someone took a piece of Cohen's soul and forced her to live with them.

Sex dolls made in the likeness of real people aren't new. The difference here is that Cohen isn't a porn star, she was never approached by the company, she never gave her consent, and she receives precisely nothing from any sales.

Jade Stanley, founder of the U.K.-based sexdollofficial.com, specializes in bespoke creations but also offers licensed porn-star dolls. "I'm actually the only company in the world that offers the service that I do," she says. "I know you've got RealDoll in the States and everything, but they still do not do what I do. I can replicate anything."

Each time someone buys one of Stanley's licensed dolls, the performer can expect around $500 (though her dolls are more expensive than those of the company that makes "Yael"). Cohen's reaction to this is as you'd expect: "Wow, that means if I actually had that, I would be very rich right now." She'd noted that "Yael" had been in the company's best-seller spot for weeks. But it isn't the money that bothers her; it's the loss of control. And when you're trying to carve out a career based on your personal brand, control is everything.

Stanley also highlights a side of the business that rarely makes the headlines: "The majority of my [*bespoke*] customers are people who suffer with anxiety or loneliness issues. It's probably one of the things that most shocked me about this business when I first got into it."

Too often we think of the carnal side and forget that, ultimately, we're all human (except the dolls). When Stanley tells me this, I reconsider the more innocent interactions I've seen on the forum. None of it seems malicious or evil—it's almost sweet. The owners probably haven't considered that somewhere the real Yael is feeling violated. But that doesn't make it okay.

The majority of my [bespoke] customers are people who suffer with **anxiety** or **loneliness issues.** It's probably one of the things that most **shocked me** about this business.

Courtesy **Alex Rayskh**

She'd have a very good claim under most states' laws for violation of her rights to publicity. So this could be a multimillion-dollar case."

When I tell Stanley about Cohen, she's appalled, saying it's not uncommon for individuals to ask for dolls based on real people, but usually it's an amalgamation—Ariana Grande's eyes, Kiera Knightley's nose, that kind of thing. It's like a modern-day version of Weird Science, where clients program their perfect woman into a computer and out pops Kelly LeBrock. But these are one-offs, not for mass production.

Adult performers have long endorsed specific body-part replicas too. You can buy Fleshlights cast from the private parts of dozens of adult performers. Misty Stone tells me she has all three of her orifices available for purchase—and a full doll made in her likeness. For her, it's a lucrative second income.

"When I first started with Fleshlight, those checks were fucking amazing," Stone says. "I get $12,000, $10,000, $6,000 here, $8,000 there. There are so many girls who have them, you know; you want to get your fans to buy yours. So you just promote, promote, promote on your social media, and you make good money back."

Ironically, that point is not lost on Cohen. "I feel in some way I'm helping them sell it because it's my name. People buy it because it's me, because it's attached to my photos." Salt, meet wound. Not only was her likeness taken, but the doll has her name and is directly linked to her. It has built-in marketing, all for the sweet price of zero dollars.

Of course there's a robust legal system in place to stop this, right? Well, no, not really. When Cohen first sought legal advice, a lawyer told her she simply wasn't famous enough. Fortunately, it turns out even us regular folks do have rights.

"What most lawyers would instantly jump on here is what's called 'the right of publicity,'" says Jonathan Steinsapir, a partner at KWIKA law firm. He should know: He represented Kendall Jenner when Cutera cosmetics allegedly used images of her to promote its products without her permission.

According to Steinsapir, most U.S. states recognize a right of publicity. If any Yael dolls are sold in those states, Cohen would have a claim. One high-profile example of the right of publicity is when Taster's Choice used a handsome male countenance on some of its labels. The plaintiff, Russell Christoff, was originally paid a trivial sum for a photo shoot with a clause stating that if his image was used in marketing, he'd be further compensated. Nestlé, owner of the Taster's Choice brand at the time, used the image again, without telling him, and paid the price. The jury initially awarded Cristoff $15 million. The final sum he received is not known.

I don't know about you, but a coffee container seems less of a personal invasion than an anatomically accurate sex doll in your likeness. Steinsapir agrees.

"If she has not consented to allow her image to be used for a sex doll, it's just offensive," he says. "She'd have a very good claim under most states' laws for violation of her rights to publicity. It would also entitle her to punitive damages, which can multiply your actual damages by anywhere up to 10 times. So this could be a multimillion-dollar case."

Unfortunately, the company that makes the Yael doll is based in China, where concepts of intellectual property are very different. Enforcing a U.S. judgment internationally is not impossible, but sometimes it might as well be. Still, the doll is sold in the U.S., so the potential is there.

Sometimes the most important judgment is one that hits a little closer to home. I ask Cohen what her mother thinks about all this. "It took me a couple of weeks to tell her," she says, "I needed to find the perfect timing and the courage to do it." When Cohen eventually took her aside, her mother was surprised but supportive. "Of course, she'd rather I stayed as a software engineer and not be on Instagram, but they love me for me."

When I reach out to the company that makes the doll, it doesn't immediately respond. I ask Cohen what one thing she would tell the company if she could.

"I honestly just want to know why," she replies. "Why did you do that?"

We may never know the answer. Neither Stanley nor Stone, both women in this industry, had ever heard of something like this beyond trivial cases like a blow-up doll that was sorta-kinda based on Miley Cyrus. Even that was more of a knock-off Halloween costume than an actual likeness.

One thing's for sure: This will happen again. The same manufacturer is already working on a doll based on actress and social media star Liza Soberano, which it flaunted on the same forum as it did "Yael."

It's hard to blame the customers. We don't know their motivations, and many won't ever know the doll they bought is based on a real person. And there will always be the victim blamers who say things like "Well, what did you expect? You're a public-facing woman on the internet" an outdated view that doesn't seem to be going anywhere soon.

As for the company behind the doll? It changed the wording of its initial forum post once it caught wind that Cohen knew about it. She also suspects some of the defensive comments about the doll on her Instagram post were from employees. Who knows how many of the company's dolls are based on unsuspecting women?

In the meantime, Cohen hopes to get back to her normal life, without the specter of her silicone sister looming over her.

"I just want to keep working on the things I love," she says, "reach people and influence them, promoting my beliefs and ideas and hopefully making the world a better place."

COURTESY IRA_EVVA

One of Playboy's go-to cannabis experts sifts through the over-crowded **CBD market**

I've been smoking weed every day for more than a decade to manage anxiety and depression. Plus, I love the feeling. There's no greater relief than your first inhale of great-tasting bud and the giggly relaxation that follows. So when CBD came on the scene, I was skeptical from the get-go.

What do you mean this is "high-less" cannabis? Wasn't the high the point and the medical benefits a lucky bonus? But in the age of COVID-19, when the whole world mirrors my sweat-soaked anxiety dreams, I figure it's finally time to give CBD a shot. After all, "weed lite's" most popular use is for stress, so maybe it could help us all stop clenching our jaws and imagining the end of days.

Not all CBD products are created equal, but there are a few helpful things you can do while seeking the good stuff. As you explore, remember that the CBD experience is subtler than a difficult-to-ignore THC high.

"This is definitely hard for people to wrap their heads around—especially THC consumers who typically equate cannabis with an immediate 'feeling,'" Degelis "Dege" Tufts, CEO and co-founder of TribeTokes, tells me when I express my CBD skepticism. "An analogy I use to help people understand better is that you can't always 'feel' Advil, you just feel generally better." I'm intrigued; anything to help me cope with this new dystopian reality.

If you're intrigued as well, consider following these five steps toward CBD mastery.

1 Investigate third-party testing

"If you've ever spoken to someone who says CBD oil doesn't affect them, it's because they probably didn't have quality CBD oil," says Dr. Philip Blair, medical director of CBD brand Elixinol. He advises folks to check if their CBD has been tested by a third-party lab for such things as potency, pesticides, residual solvents and terpene profiles to help determine the quality of the product. Tufts of TribeTokes notes that products should have a QR code on the label that you can scan to read these results.

Kymberly "KymB" Byrnes, chief marketing officer and co-founder of TribeTokes, suggests you google the tests to ensure they're from an accredited lab. "We always say, if they can't answer your questions, you shouldn't be buying from them," she says.

So if a brand ignores your request for lab results—or your queries about, for example, where the plants are grown—it's likely not making high-quality stuff. Tufts reminds Playboy that hemp CBD brands are not required to lab-test their products, but the industry insists on "self-regulation" that provides consumers with the transparent and clean products they deserve.

2 Scan the ingredients

Cannabis-oil labels can appear to be filled with jargon if you don't know what you're looking at. Full spectrum, broad spectrum, isolate? Hemp-derived, cannabis-rich, phytocannabinoid.... What does any of this stuff even mean?

First, it's important to know that CBD can be sourced from either the hemp plant, which is legal around the country, or the marijuana plant, which is legal in certain states for adult and/or medical use. The main legal difference between the two is hemp has less than 0.3 percent THC (the federal limit) and marijuana has more. Otherwise, all the experts and entrepreneurs I spoke to said the difference in experience between hemp- and marijuana-derived CBD is minimal, and adding more THC into one's routine will be a matter of preference and access.

Why does this matter? Basically, experts like Blair believe the medical benefits of cannabis are dependent on much more than CBD or THC, they're a combination of the plant's 400-plus compounds, including various cannabinoids, terpenes, sugars and flavonoids. This theory is known as the "entourage effect."

When searching for the most effective medicine, it's best to opt for "full spectrum" products if they're derived from hemp—meaning none of the plant's compounds have been removed, so they can all work together in their optimal, synergetic way. Unless, says Tufts, you're drug-tested regularly; then your best bet is a CBD-isolate product, because it won't show up on a drug screening. Just keep in mind that you might need to take a higher dose for the full effect.

From there, you'll want to read the label for a few other key points. Is it organic? If it truly is, it should have the USDA Organic certification seal on it. If it's an ingestible CBD oil, you'll also want to check what kind of carrier oils are used. MCT oil (most commonly from coconut oil) and hemp-seed oil are popular and desirable choices. If you're looking for an organic product, make sure these oils are organic as well.

3 Check the dose

Besides scanning the label for quality, check for quantity—as in,

how many milligrams does this product contain? CBD-oil labels can be tricky to read when it comes to dose. But most often, the listed milligrams, such as 700 or 1,000, are for the entire bottle, not a single serving size. And what is a decent serving size? That's kind of a mystery that takes a bit of personal trial and error to figure out. Blair recommends folks start with around 15 milligrams twice a day and see how they feel. He adds that good dosages are 30 milligrams a day for stress, 60 milligrams for immune disorders and as much as 180 milligrams for pain.

"I have a friend who takes 15 milligrams for anxiety and 30 for sleep. That's her cocktail. But mine is different," says Byrnes. "I take 50 to 70 milligrams for sleep. For anxiety I like to mix CBD and THC. Things like age, weight, underlying conditions and altitude can all make a difference. Research and experimenting are your best bet."

It can be an expensive hobby, but she's right: Experimenting with different doses and ratios of CBD to THC is the ideal way to find something that works for you. And remember: If you're shopping for CBD oil, make sure each serving size is at least 10 to 20 milligrams or you won't be able to reach effective doses without consuming half the bottle in one go.

4. Dose regularly

Unlike ingesting a THC edible, whose noticeable effects emerge an hour or so later, CBD is more of a long game when it comes to wellness enhancement, and folks report the most benefits when they take it daily. Especially in these taxing, unprecedented times, you'll likely get more stress relief if you take a reasonable dose two or three times a day rather than one big dose when you're freaking out. The effects may not be immediately noticeable, but when you look back at the week you'll likely realize it was a lot calmer and more manageable than the weeks before.

"Do you take a vitamin twice a week and expect it to make a difference?" asks Byrnes. "CBD should be integrated into your everyday lifestyle. Like an apple a day or yoga every damn day—CBD is the same."

There are many theories to explain this. "Regular dosing creates subtle changes in metabolism and epigenetics and regulates the immune system," says Blair. Tufts points to Harvard Medical School's hypothesis that chronic inflammation is the "unifying theory of disease," emphasizing CBD's anti-inflammatory properties as its mechanism for promoting relief from a wide array of conditions. Regardless of how it works, staying dosed up definitely seems to help people the most, whether they're using it for stress, pain or other conditions.

5. Keep track and adjust

If you're a regular high-THC-cannabis consumer like me and are struggling to figure out CBD's effects, start a journal. By keeping track of the dose and product, as well as your mood and symptoms, you can zero in on what—if anything—CBD is doing for you and make necessary adjustments.

"Keeping a journal is valuable because of the subtle changes you may not notice," explains Blair. "Many people often feel there are no improvements, until they stop, then they realize many things are happening."

CBD isn't a quick fix, but it can be a natural antidote to stress, sleeplessness and more serious conditions. And if there were ever a time to try weed lite, it's probably now.

"CBD should be integrated into your everyday lifestyle. Like an apple a day or yoga every damn day—CBD is the same."

ATHENA
ANDERSON

Athena, happy to have you for a feature on Playboy South Africa! Can you tell us what the inspiration behind this photoshoot was? I'm beyond thrilled to be featured in this issue of Playboy South Africa. The inspiration behind this photoshoot was hippie vibes baby! I identify as a bougie millennial hippie and I wanted this shoot to portray that. I personally think I was born in the wrong decade. I strongly advocate for free love and making peace not war. And when you get to know me you'll understand what I'm talking about, it's not just about beer bottoms. I'm a free spirit with a wild heart.

Best place you have ever been to in the world? Well this is hard cause I've traveled to many places domestically and internationally, in my childhood and in my early adult life. I've visited almost every state in the United States apart from Wyoming, Montana and the Dakotas, which I would love to go visit soon. But the best place in the world would be a toss-up between Thailand and Israel. When I went to Thailand, I visited for a little over a month and there I learned a valuable life lesson, and that is not to search for peace, but to create it yourself. I loved it over there so much I literally almost moved my entire life out there haha, but realistically had to get back to my career, but who knows, maybe one day. But if I absolutely had to pick one place it would be Israel. I choose Israel because I had the opportunity to learn about my Jewish heritage and culture. I think it's very important to understand where you come from and get back to your roots. That trip taught me so much about myself and my ancestors before me. It was a real eye-opener. I also forged unforgettable bonds that I will forever cherish and if any of my TAGLIT friends are reading this, L'CHAIM.

What are some of your biggest dreams you hope to achieve? My main passion is skincare. I am a licensed esthetician and I have my own skincare business called "Esteebri Skin Therapy" and also my own product line. But what I REALLY would love and hope to do, is to give back and start a not-for-profit skincare company that works closely with oncology departments in hospitals to heal those suffering with skin conditions, such as burn victims, cancer survivors, etc. I have a skin disorder, my skin literally attacks and eats itself, it's so hard to live with and manage, but I've done an exceptional job at healing and managing it that you would have never even guessed. I know what it's like to not want to be in your own skin, so I want to help those so they don't have to feel like I did. I'm not just in the business of making people look good, I'm in the business of making people feel good.

What helps you decompress and relax? SPORTS help me decompress. I'm a big sports girl. I played D1 softball so to me sports have been my entire life and my first career. When I finished my softball career, I picked up golf and bowling. I totally fell in love with my new sports and dove headfirst in, invested a lot of time, energy, and money to being an exceptional athlete, so when I'm having a day or need to make time for myself you can find me in the batting cages, on the golf course, or in the bowling alley. BUT what helps me relax, is giving someone a facial massage. It is such an honor to be able to transfer energy with my hands and work on someone's most vulnerable part of their body, the money maker, their face! I'm so energetic and talkative all the time, but the only time I'm truly calm, relaxed, and soothing is when I'm massaging someone's face and making them feel good. That gets me off! Haha.

Who has been the most influential person in your life and why? This is such a hard question. I have a two-part answer.
My mom, Christine Anderson (I used her last name as my stage name and boy she wasn't happy but eventually came around). This woman holds it down. Me and my mom had a rough relationship growing up, I was a daddy's girl and did not respect my mom until I got into my later adult life where I finally understood her strength and love. She is a strong, fiery, firecracker and I definitely get my strength from her, especially everything she's been through. She has taught me a lot not just through her good doing, but also through her mistakes. My mother would walk through hell twice and back just to get me anything I ever needed. Her love is intoxicating, I've never felt anything so intense and damn she loves me so much and she's not afraid to make it known.

Then there is my dad, Sam Stricker. He is not my biological father, but he is that man that chose to be my dad, he stepped up and raised me and my siblings when he didn't have to. He showed me how a man should love and treat a woman. He would give me the world if I asked for it. This man wasn't genetically bound to love me, but still stepped up to the plate and did. I don't call my biological father dad. I call Sam DAD. Just because we aren't blood, doesn't mean we aren't family. I'm blessed to have a great father figure. Truly.

How romantic are you? For whatever reason, this is the question that I'm having a hard time answering. I've stared at it for 10 minutes now and I can't come up with a concise answer. I'm romantic if it's deserved and earned. If I receive romance, I reciprocate 10-fold. I'm such a giver and I get very little back and that is totally okay because my love is unconditional, but now I've become more selective of who has earned that vulnerable side of me. But when you look at romance, romance is "the feeling of excitement and mystery associated with love". I LOVE to LOVE everyone, even those who don't love me. I would walk through hell ten times back for my friends or loved ones if they needed me to, whether they asked or not. Only if you knew the lengths I've gone for not only my friends, but complete strangers. I think people think romance is an action you do to display love, but my interpretation of romance is I believe it isn't about buying it is about giving. Anyone can buy their loved one their favorite candy, but would you save them the last piece of your favorite candy? So yes, I'm a reckless romantic, but I wouldn't change a damn thing.

What is the most memorable date you've ever had? My most memorable date would be the one I planned for my ex-husband and I. It was our third date and I told him I had a surprise and to meet me at the address I sent him at 6pm. I was living in San Diego at the time, and I planned a bonfire dinner on the beach providing a home-cooked meal. Well, I'll let you in on a secret, I did not have the slightest clue on how to set up a bonfire and as far as the healthy home-cooked meal goes, I DO NOT COOK. REPEAT, I DO NOT COOK. I would have accidentally poisoned that man had I attempted to cook a meal. To this day, I will not cook, and I cherish my chef. Anyways, back on track, so I already put the date in motion and sent myself into a sheer PANIC. I went to the grocery store and then I thought WHAT THE HECK DO I EVEN NEED FOR A BONFIRE? So, I called my best friend Roger and he came to the rescue. He met me at the beach and put together the biggest, well-put-together bonfire I ever seen. It was so perfect it looked like it came straight off Pinterest, it definitely said Athena did not do this'. But anyways, one problem solved, but what about this home-cooked meal? I called one of my favorite restaurants in San Diego, PB Fish Shop, and ordered salmon, veggies, and rice. What did I do? I took that delicious, well-cooked meal and put in my Tupperware, ditched the to-go containers, and brought that shit to the beach and called it my own. Well, I lost track of time, I had to be back at the spot in 5 minutes, panic sets in BUT I MADE IT. My ex shows up with a sparkle in his eye, he is absolutely amazed. The kicker? The first thing he said to me was, wow what a bonfire! I played that shit so cool. Oh, but wait it gets better... I bring out my 'home cooked meal' I slaved away cooking and present him the Tupperware. HE RAVED about how good it was and that it was the best salmon he ever had. After our dinner, I had a so brought s'mores and we laid on the beach listening to music eating delicious, yummy in my tummy s'mores. HE NEVER KNEW I GOT AWAY WITH IT,. at least, I thought. About a few short months later, he requests the salmon and wants to cook it to-

gether. HAHA, he was completely taken back when he tried the second version (told him I was trying a new recipe) and it looked like he legitimately wanted to throw it up. Well, we ended up getting married a couple years later and I eventually came clean, he couldn't believe it.

What makes you the ultimate partner to have? What makes me the ultimate partner? This has been the easiest question to answer. My partner's happiness comes before anything. If I love you, I want you to be happy. I will support my partner in anything they pursue. For example, sexually I don't own or possess anyone. With that said, my partner has the freedom to do as he pleases. For example, if I had a husband and he want to explore another person intimately, I would ask him if he's happy and if it makes him happy that's all that should matter. I don't own his body and who I am to tell him what he can and cannot do with it. To my future partner, I have 4 requests: 1) You see a hot chick and you want to fuck her? Cool, can I join? Oh, no she's not into threesomes and doesn't want me joining? Cool well then, #2 Can I watch? Ah, she thinks that's weird and says no. Well damn, can you send pictures or video? Nope, she doesn't want to be on camera. OKAY FINE THEN, rule #1 just tell me! Give me the details. I want to know how it was and if it made you feel good and happy. My friends think I'm crazy, they ask me what if they hook up with someone else and they fall in love with them and leave you? I reply, well does it make him happy? As long as he is happy, with or without me, I support it.

How important is sex to you in a relationship? Sex is at the bottom of my list when it comes to relationships. It's just an added bonus in my opinion. What is important to me is my partner accepts me for who I am and loves me for who I am and the things I want to pursue in this world.
I can be way more intimate and show love to someone in more ways without having to be sexually psychical. I want to be loved, not just fucked.

What is your idea of a really good time? Sitting by my fireplace and reading a book. Don't get me wrong, I always have a really good time. I love a good night out, concerts, comedy shows, and sports. But for me, I'm constantly doing something and always on the go.
I rarely ever get to sit down and have time to myself to indulge in a novel. So when I get the opportunity to, it makes me happy.

Any word of advice to fans on the right way to approach you? PLEASE SAY HI! I'll always spare a minute to chat with a fan. But please ask for consent before you touch me, that is all I ask.

Thanks for taking the time to speak to us, any last words to our readers? My final words. Lead with a good heart and try to make a positive impact on anyone's life. My favorite motto is 'pay it forward'. Spread the good in this world, we need more of it. And don't forget, you get what you give. So give respect, love, and kindness, even to those who may not even deserve it.

Role Play

Could Be the Sexual Savior
Your Quarantine Life Needs

Sales of sexy costumes are spiking as socially isolated couples fight bedroom boredom

BY **ANITA LITTLE**

Many of us have passed the six-week point in quarantine. For those lucky enough—or unlucky enough—to be marooned with a partner, this may be when things start to fray. The frustrating habits you formerly had a workplace refuge from are now your 24-7 reality.

Of the challenges couples may be dealing with, bedroom boredom is a big one. Physical intimacy is one of the few joys folks have left right now, and the increased time together is a great opportunity to refresh your sexy-time repertoire. And there's arguably no better form of sexual escapism than pretending to be someone else.

Enter sexual role-play. Your brain is your biggest sex organ, and role-play is an easy and safe way to test the limits of your imagination.

Recent stats show that more and more couples are discovering this. We reached out to Alicia Thompson, director of brand marketing at Yandy, a lingerie and costume company that has experienced a significant uptick in sales since quarantine started. (Full disclosure: Yandy is owned by Playboy's parent company.)

"People want to transport themselves out of what's going on during quarantine," she tells Playboy. "They are allowing themselves to push their boundaries a little bit more and maybe try to seek out pleasure in a new way."

From March 15 to April 12, Yandy saw a 31 percent increase in sales of its bedroom costumes, with the first major spike on March 22, which is no coincidence. That was the first weekend of lockdown for many states, including California and New York. The top costume searches for March and April were the expected role-play fare—schoolgirl, French maid, sexy nurse—plus tiger, a newcomer whose popularity Thompson attributes to a certain Netflix show. The latest numbers had Yandy sales up a whooping 136 percent year over year. All signs point to stir-crazy partners looking to liven up their routines.

Sophie Saint Thomas, popular sex writer and author of the upcoming Sex Witch: Magickal Spells for Love, Lust, and Self-Protection, describes role-play as "make-believe with very real orgasms." She says her role-play has increased in quarantine. She and her boyfriend enjoy cheerleader, housewife and complete-stranger scenarios.

"When you're stuck alone with one other person in a studio apartment, you've got to keep the sex interesting or else you'll start to hate one another," she tells us. "Sex is primal, but it does not have to be unthoughtful. Variety is the spice of life."

Playboy also reached out to sexpert Jess O'Reilly, Ph.D. and host of the @SexWithDrJess podcast, to get the lowdown on integrating role-play into your quarantine.

"Engaging in role-play is the antidote to boredom in the bedroom. This may be just what you need to get in the mood for sex when life is full of distractions or feels overwhelming," she says.

O'Reilly adds that the best role-play scenarios are often ones that stray from the roles you occupy in real life: "If you manage great responsibility at work or in the home, you may derive great pleasure from indulging in a submissive role. And if you spend most of your days catering to everyone else's needs, playing a selfish role may be the perfect escape from reality."

She emphasizes that couples shouldn't fixate on choosing a scenario, start by considering what emotion you're attempting to evoke and choose a scenario from there. If you want to feel more powerful or more submissive, try a scenario that revolves around a switch of the usual dynamics, such as boss and assistant. Want to feel safe or rescued? A firefighter scene may make sense. Above all, setting boundaries is necessary in any new sexual exploration, and great communication can't be understated. Your likes and dislikes should be an ongoing conversation with your partner. A few questions O'Reilly encourages you to ask: What words turn you on? What scenarios make you uncomfortable? What fears underlie this discomfort? How will you check in with one another during a role-play?

Sex is primal, but it does not have to be unthoughtful. Variety is the spice of life.

What about those who can't drop cash on elaborate costumes and props? Far more important than any getup is your own mind. With dirty talk, it's possible to create and fulfill any fantasy.

"Use your words," O'Reilly says. "You can weave stories, play roles, switch personalities, make empty promises that feel real—with consent—and lead your lover into far-off sexual and emotional lands."

Getting down to brass tacks, O'Reilly's offers three pieces of must-know advice for beginners:

1. TURN DOWN THE LIGHTS.

Many of us feel more confident and less inhibited in the dark, and it makes for fewer distractions.

2. WAIT UNTIL YOU'RE HIGHLY AROUSED.

Once you're there, your confidence will likely soar—so don't start the role-play until you've deeply indulged in sex play.

3. DO WHAT FEELS GOOD FOR YOU.

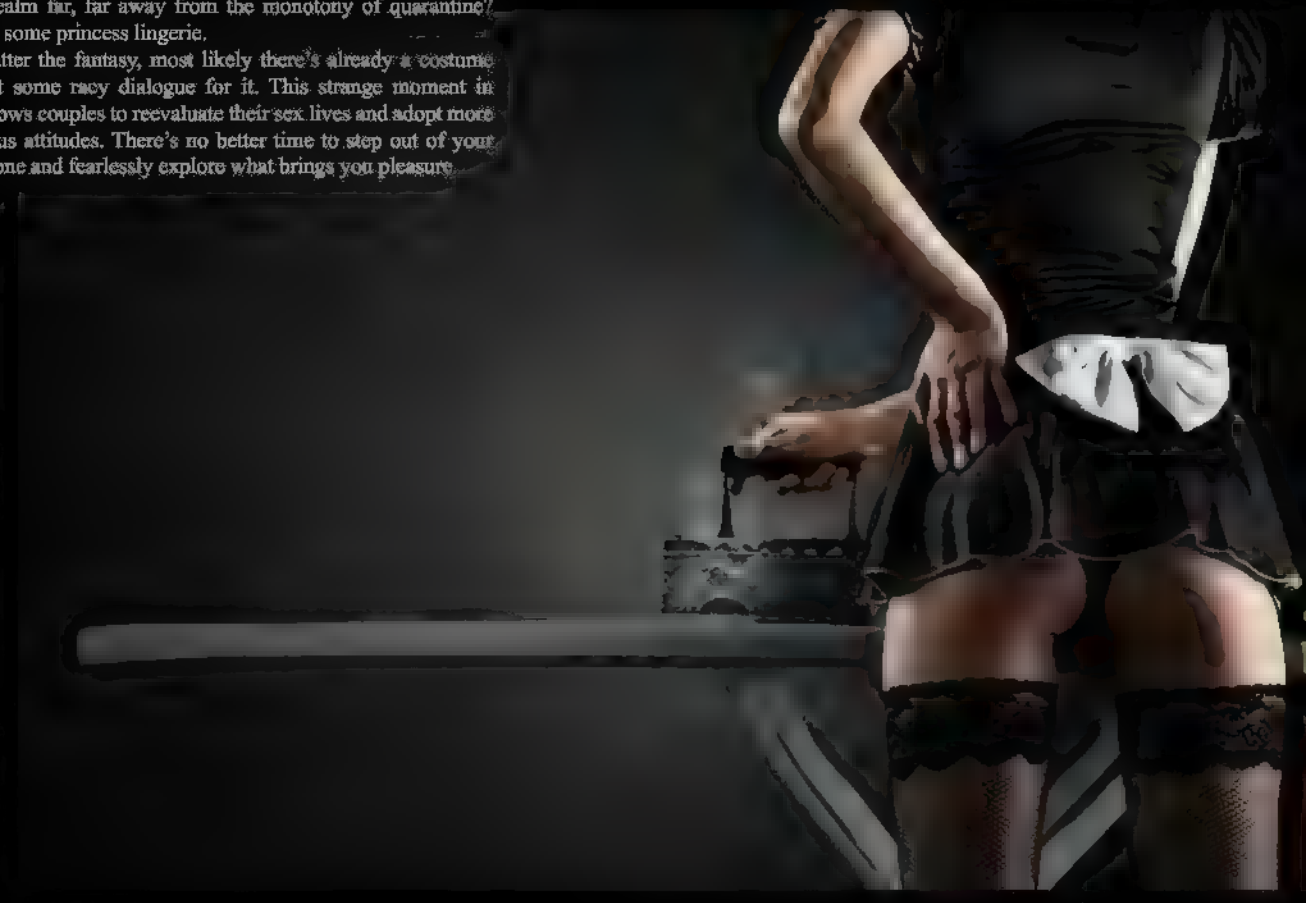
...Instead of worrying about what your partner wants. Injecting your own personality into your new role will help ease you into character.

Once you've absorbed the basic tips and tricks, consider these looks—fun, easy to find and excellent for beginners.

Miss flying and travel? A "mile-high club stewardess" or "flight captain" costume could be what you need. In a world overrun with chaos, want to feel like you can still be your own superhero? Try on this "Glamazonian" fit for size. Need to pretend you're in a magical realm far, far away from the monotony of quarantine? Check out some princess lingerie.

No matter the fantasy, most likely there's already a costume or at least some racy dialogue for it. This strange moment in history allows couples to reevaluate their sex lives and adopt more adventurous attitudes. There's no better time to step out of your comfort zone and fearlessly explore what brings you pleasure.

This strange moment in history allows couples to **reevaluate** their sex lives and **adopt more adventurous** attitudes.



Pro Dommes

LAY DOWN THEIR WHIPS

As America shelters in place, a surprising new dynamic is emerging between dominatrices and their clients

WRITTEN BY
JERA BROWN

PHOTOGRAPHY BY
SAKKMESTERKE

"They're buying the sizzle, not the steak."

That's the advice I got from a friend when I was just starting out as a professional dominatrix. Clients are not just looking to be spanked; they're looking to be spanked by a cruel, latex- or leather-clad, larger-than-life mistress.

As is the case for any performer, maintaining an all-encompassing experience requires us to be "on," using a specific domme mind-set that sucks our clients in. But during this national crisis, being "on" comes with entirely new challenges.

"Emotional and psychological energy is in short supply for everyone these days, and I am no exception," Lady Sophia Chase wrote on the home page of her website. Lady Sophia is a Chicago-based domme who uses her master's degree in clinical social work in her domination practice. "I just can't step into 'Mistress mode' for online sessions right now.... Instead I want to talk with you."

Like many pro dommes, myself included, Sophia is focusing her stay-at-home energies exclusively on digital offerings such as phone and video domination sessions and subscription platforms such as AVN Stars and OnlyFans. But those who call Sophia will find themselves talking to a different domme from the one they'd meet in the dungeon, because Sophia isn't interested in getting into character right now.

The difference may be subtle. On a recent call with a long-time client, Sophia gave instructions for how to suck her strap-on—not something that naturally excites her. "But because my client wasn't there serving as a physical distraction, I was able to zone in on what actually does turn me on and marry it to what turns my client on," she tells me. "I feel like they got a more genuinely sexually enthusiastic me, whether they knew it or not."

We choose this line of work because certain things come naturally to us: We're not squeamish; we enjoy inflicting pain or discomfort; we need to be in control. All this is still true whether we're in "mistress mode" or not. But during sessions, we're frequently forced to play up how cruel or turned on we are and hide pieces of ourselves, such as gentleness or goofiness, that don't fit the character.

People who ask if I'm a "real domme" or "truly sadistic" don't realize that what they're looking for is only half of what I'm capable of offering. Many of my favorite clients are interested in getting to know the "real" me and seem to understand that compassion and sadism can go hand-in-hand. As a result, they're rewarded with vulnerability and a more genuine connection. And amid this national crisis, many of us find more men seeking this holistic connection with dommes. (It's worth noting that some dommes prefer not to share personal details with their clients, opting to keep their sessions in the realm of performance and fantasy.)

Mistress Eden Newmar, a Chicago-based pro domme who has been offering services in person and on the phone for four years, has found that regulars who once called her solely to be humiliated now wish to discuss their pandemic-era lives. They talk to her about their fear of losing their jobs, or they complain about the lack of privacy being stuck at home with their families. Eden believes these calls add new emotional depth to her relationships with her clients.

Why are the needs of clients changing in this way? My theory is it's all about control. I frequently see or talk to men with demanding jobs who are seeking an outlet where they don't have to be in charge and make decisions. These days many men don't have that sense of power. They no longer seek control or surrender; they want stability.

But not everyone's needs are changing. Many of my regular phone-based clients are looking for the same fantasies they've been calling me about for years. They don't ask how I'm doing, and they don't want me to ask about their lives, because they don't want to break the fantasy. They don't see me as a person outside that fantasy, and I'm perfectly okay with that.

As a domme who specializes in boxing fetishes and beat-downs, I get the majority of my calls from men who want to play out scenarios in which I use my incredible strength to kidnap them and keep them as my slave or work them over and humiliate them in my fantasy boxing gym surrounded by fellow pugilists with huge, sweat-slicked muscles—and ready cocks, for the bi-questioning.

These calls rarely represent what I do with clients in person. In a similar session we may simulate kidnapping or blackmail but only after working out safe words. Boxing often turns one-sided but never to the point of risking permanent damage. And these sessions always happen in private—to my knowledge, no orgy-ready boxing gym exists.

And yet fantastical virtual sessions are no less authentic or genuine. On many calls, I sense men are showing me a secret part of themselves that few have access to. Likewise, I bring out different aspects of myself. This can cut both ways: When seeing clients in person, I and other BDSM and fetish providers tend to use frameworks such as "risk-aware BDSM" and "safe, sane and consensual," encouraging limits and verbal consent. But phone and text-based sex work offers little to no room to discuss boundaries. Via calls and messages, I've beaten up people's wives and kidnapped, raped and even killed clients as they've jerked off and urged me on. I'm constantly questioning what responsibility I bear for the mental health of my clients. I also question why, even when I'm uncomfortable in these morally gray areas, I'm often turned on as well. All of this leads me to a deeper exploration of myself—to echo Sophia, whether the client knows it or not.

Sometimes being vulnerable requires us to be more honest about our everyday lives, and sometimes it requires more exposure to the fantasies we escape into—domme and sub alike.

I personally find online and in-person services equally meaningful, but others, such as Mistress Hecuba, cannot wait to get back to seeing clients in the flesh. As a pro domme, Hecuba balances fear and degradation play with healing work that focuses on somatic awareness. For her, online connections simply fall short. "There's something missing," she tells me. "It's intimate, but it's disconnected in ways that aren't as fulfilling as in-person play. It's disembodied." And yet even she has found that online sessions provide opportunities for a different kind of connection.

Hecuba recently spent an hour on the phone with one of her in-person regulars, simply discussing their relationship. Her submissive had a come-to-Jesus moment about what his role as a client should be. He'd been feeling neglected by Hecuba and realized the root of this hurt was his inability to accept that theirs was an intimate but still professional relationship—a common issue we face with clients.

For people we see in the flesh, these intimate discussions can be rare, but when they happen, they lead to better connections and better scenes. "To me, that's the perfect way to play," Hecuba explains. "The more I'm able to get to know you as a person, the more I'm able to give up myself to you."

This intimacy brings about a level of confidence and a greater ability to be nurturing but in the sadistic way that her clients are searching for.

"I know where you're coming from," Hecuba will tell her clients, "and I know you're having a hard time with this issue, but you're still going to stick your tongue in my asshole."

Many of my favorite clients are interested in getting to know the "real" me and seem to understand that compassion and sadism can go hand-in-hand.

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Aytekin Uzer

Ear Nose Throat

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